INDIAN THOUGHT
A CRITICAL SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

A systematic study of Indian philosophy and culture began only as late as the last years of the eighteenth century. The establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 at the initiative of a few professors of Oxford University marked a turning point in this direction. This was, perhaps, due to the thirst for knowledge impelled by the rise of capitalism and the development of science and culture accompanying it. Perhaps, it was also necessitated by the interests of the British rulers themselves who, in order to consolidate their power, wanted to acquaint themselves with the traditions and history of India. Whatever the motives, eminent scholars like Sir William Jones, Colebrook, Wilson and others began a serious study of the material and spiritual culture of this ancient land. These pioneers were followed by A.E. Gough, Max Muller Deussen, Davids, Jacobi, Richard Garbe and many others. By the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of ancient works on philosophy and religion had been translated from Sanskrit into English and other European languages.

Subsequently, some significant original works on the history of Indian Philosophy and religion and on the different philosophical systems of ancient India also came to be written. These works stimulated the interest of many Indian intellectuals in the history of their country, and in the first half of the twentieth century a large number of books on Indian philosophy were written by Indian scholars. In this endeavour, however, they relied heavily on their European counterparts who were looked upon as almost infallible authorities on the subject.

The First World War and its aftermath, the Socialist Revolution in Russia, which marked the rise of the first Socialist State in the world, the unprecedented changes in the economic and political conditions throughout the world - all these gave an impetus to our struggle for independence. In fact, the liberation movement entered a new stage in the twenties of the present century. It was precisely in this period that great Indian scholars like Dasgupta, Radhakrishnan, Belvalkar, Hiriyanna and Vidyabhushan published their important works on the history of Indian philosophy, which threw much light on our cultural heritage, its richness and diversity.

Studies of this kind naturally made Indians feel proud of their past and roused their national consciousness.

These philosophical works, however, had many shortcomings and limitations. Most of them were written from the standpoint of idealism, the materialistic traditions of our country being ignored or underestimated. A

few pages, of course, were devoted to Charvaka darsana, but even that was depicted as something alien to our national spirit. The history of our philosophy was not viewed as a history of the struggle between idealism and materialism, but as a continuous , unbroken stream of idealist thought. This tendency to present Indian philosophical thought as exclusively idealist or metaphysical is still dominant among our philosophers and scholars. Frequent references to the supposed contrast between the materialist values of the West and the spiritual values of the East, the emphasis made on “the Vedantic spirit of India" and the theories of Indian exceptionalism, have all left their mark on the thinking of the people, Consequently, the spirit of Indian philosophy is widely believed to be essentially based on *adhyat-mavada* or metaphysics.

But the fact remains that materialism has exerted a powerful influence on the Indian mind in the different epochs of our history. As Radhakrishnan said, “Materialism is as old as philosophy.”[1]

An objectively truthful assessment of India's philosophical heritage, therefore, calls for a proper appreciation of the important contributions made by materialist philosophy to the development of Indian thought. When many of our scholars and educationalists are engaged in the search for a philosophy which integrates the modern scientific spirit with our cultural heritage, this becomes doubly important.

Another serious defect often noticed in the works of these scholars is that they explain the ancient systems and doctrines in isolation from their social and economic basis. Each darsana is elaborated not historically but as complete in itself. Thus, lsvara Krishna of the early centuries of the Christian era and Vijnana Bhikshu of the sixteenth century A.D. are clubbed together under the Sankhya system. The distance in time between the Buddha and Dharma-kirti is often ignored. Few realise that philosophical systems and doctrines can be properly understood only when they are studied against their economic and social background.

Philosophy, like any other manifestation of human thought or ideology reflects, in the final analysis, the social and economic character of a people. Changes in social and economic conditions cannot but influence their ideological superstructure. “The mode of production of the material means of existence,” wrote Marx, “conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines

1 Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy* Vol. 1, p, 277.

their consciousness."[2]

This statement of Marx has nothing to do with vulgar and primitive "economism." To say that the economic structure of society is the real basis which gives rise to ideas and institutions does not mean that everything in society is determined by economic development. Relations of production are the decisive factors in determining the position of individuals and classes in society, but they are not the only factors to be taken into consideration. Changes in philosophical or religious systems are not mechanical accompaniments of economic and technical changes. They have an independent existence of their own and develop in a relatively autonomous manner and even influence economic and technical changes. Engels wrote: "Political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form, There is an interaction of all these elements, in which amid al1 the endless host of accidents (i.e. of things and events whose inter-connection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent and can neglect it), the economic movement really asserts itself as necessary, Otherwise, the application of the theory to any period of history one chose would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the just degree."[3]

The whole history of India, with the vast changes in the political, ideological, religious and philosophic spheres during the last five thousand years, remains yet to be fully examined in the light of this fundamental principle. But theories and principles are only guides for further study. They are not dogmas and cannot be applied to all situations indiscriminately. "Principles," as Engels himself has pointed out, "are not the point of departure of the investigation, but its result; they are not applied to nature and human history but rather abstracted from them; nature and the realm of man do not follow the principles, rather the principles are correct only in so far as they correspond to nature and history. This is the only materialist version of the matter."[4]

But principles, which are themselves the results of scientific investigation, can certainly be used as guides in historian researches. The religious and philosophical ideas of India have to be examined in the light of these

2 Marx : *Critique of Political Economy*

3 The Correspondence of Marx and Engels.

4 Engels: Anti Duhring.

principles and put in their proper economic and social setting.

Today, the study of our past and particularly of our philosophical traditions is not an abstract and academic work. Many intellectuals of our country have realised that the cultivation of a world-outlook, which rouses the creative energy of our people, imparts a vigorous spirit of self-confidence and purposefulness to their life, and develops their initiative in nation-building activities with the clear perspective of a socialist India, has become a major national task. Such an outlook has to be positive in its attitude to the fast-changing world and to the spirit of scientific enquiry. Our concern, therefore, should not only be confined to a narration of the different schools of thought and an elaboration of the values we have inherited; we have also to subject them to rational methods of scrutiny and adaptation so that they may be acceptable to the modern mind. This volume is an attempt in that direction.

CHAPTER ONE

ANCIENT MAN IN INDIA

With the discovery of traces of a well-developed, very ancient civilisation in the Indus Valley at Mohenjo-daro, Chandu-daro and Harappa, our knowledge of the history of the Indian people has considerably advanced. Until the unearthing of this great urban civilisation which flourished from about 3,000 B.C. to 1,500 B.C., the history of India began for us with the advent of the Aryans. The whole period prior to that was dismissed in a few words as prehistoric darkness. Though idyllic descriptions were made of the nature of the Aryan or Vedic civilisation, little was known about the evolution of that civilisation, nor had there been any attempt to trace its origin. It was assumed that the Aryans who overran the Indo-Gangetic plain brought with them a perfect and fully developed civilisation and planted it on Indian soil. British historians tried to prove that the history of India was nothing but a series of invasions and conquests by various tribes and peoples from outside. They perhaps advanced this theory to justify their own invasion and conquest of India. Indian nationalist historians, on the other hand, used to exaggerate the antiquity of the Aryan civilisation and extol its glories. They described this civilisation as something created by the ancient sages or rishis who lived in the dark, dense forests, far away from the trials and tribulations of an earthly life.

These myths of the Arsha origin of the Indian civilisation and its immutability were blown up with the discovery of the remnants of the early pre-Aryan society in various parts of the country. It has now been established that, like the other great civilisations, Indian civilisation too had to pass through various vicissitudes corresponding to changes in the modes of existence and in the environments of the people. As Zeuner points out, the Indus Valley Civilisation, which is about 4,500 years old, "is preceded by a very long period measured in tens and hundreds of thousands of years, during which man did not know the use of the metals, had no agriculture, and was living as a mere food-gatherer."[5]

What was the origin of the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India? Can we form an idea of the remotest antiquity of man in the country? And what was the mode of his existence? It is futile to look for historical records, travel notes, literary works and such other sources in this context, for they are just not

5 F.E. Zeuner: *Pre-history in India*, p. 3.

available. Man learnt to write only at a later stage in the development of his social life, This does not mean that we are completely helpless in the matter. With the help of archaeology, ethnology and anthropology, efforts can surely be made to reconstruct a picture of life as it obtained in the ancient past.

Man arose through the evolutionary process from the animal world about a million years ago. The primitive men, or apemen as they are called by scientists, laboured hard against the forces of nature and in this process they started using tools and implements. Labour is the primary condition of all human existence and it begins with the making of tools. It was by learning to make tools that the first human beings set themselves apart from other animals and began to work on nature and transform it in their own favour. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, they, at the same time, changed their own nature and began to develop their dormant powers. The more their collective labour developed, the richer their thoughts and ideas grew.

To determine the stages of socioeconomic evolution on a scientific basis, the best criterion is man's mode of production and appropriation of food and other materials for his individual and social life. Once we know their mode of production, the nature of their implements and instruments of production, we can understand something about the life of ancient societies and the stages of their development, Marx observed: “Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economical forms of society, as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economical epochs. Instruments of labour not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labour has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions under which that labour is carried on”[6]

Anthropologists have divided social evolution into three stages : Savagery, Barbarism and Civilisation. Though there are different views on the criteria to be adopted, this classification itself is seldom disputed because it is revealed even today in primitive tribes of various cultural levels found in India and in different parts of the world.

Engels generalised Morgan's periodization as follows:

“Savagery - the period in which the appropriation of natural products ready for use predominated, the things produced by men were, in the main,

6 Marx: Capital, Vol. I, pp. 179-180.

instruments that facilitated this appropriation. Barbarism - the period in which knowledge of cattle breeding and land cultivation was acquired, in which methods of increasing the productivity of nature through human activity were learnt. Civilization - the period in which knowledge of the further working up of natural products, of industry proper and of art was acquired,"[7]

Thanks to the painstaking efforts of archaeologists and anthropologists, some clear traces have been discovered of the origin of Indian civilisation and its development from Savagery to Barbarism. True, there has not been any systematisation of all the available archaeological data, and whatever interpretations have been made are often vague and contradictory. With the help of scientific methodology, however, we can overcome these shortcomings to a certain extent and make an effort to reconstruct the past in its movement and concatenation.

It was Dr. Rebel Bruce Foote who discovered the first palaeolithic implement in India at Pallavaram in Madras state as early as 1863, The discoveries of this great scientist and his successors have proved beyond doubt that the primitive palaeolithic man lived in India thousands of years before the advent of the Aryans. By the end of the nineteenth century evidence of a rich neolithic culture was found at Bellary in South India. Excavations followed at various places in the country and an extensive Stone Age culture that flourished in pre-historic India was unearthed.

These archaeological discoveries were accompanied by anthropological researches on the forms of family, religious cults, economic and social organisations and other institutional forms of the primitive tribes and castes in our country. We are thus in a position to know something about our stone-age ancestors who lived in the stages of savagery and barbarism.

How did those primitive men, the most ancient people of India, live? And what became of them? No definite answer can be given to such questions. But it will not be wrong to believe that their life must have been unbearably difficult in the face of the depredations of wild animals and the fury of the elements. Yet they held on with determination and courage, The hunting and fishing weapons, the stone chisels, the remnants of wooden hand-looms, various kinds of pottery, and the drawings on some of these relics help us to understand the life of the stone age people in India. With these crude tools and implements fashioned out of rough stones, they must have gathered wild fruits and roots and killed animals and birds for food.

7 Engels: Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.

The O1d Stone Age men improved their weapons slowly and gradually. They learned to sharpen and shape their crude implements into polished hammers, axes, chisels, etc. Neolithic axes from Sangana Kallu Hill near Bellary, excavated by Dr. B. Subba Rao, show that the art of polishing stone implements was widely practised in the New Stone Age. Before the period of polished axes, the primitive man in India had learned to make small and sharp stone artifacts or microliths, "which he stuck together with resin or pitch and which he fastened into halts or handles."[8] Such microlithic instruments have been discovered in northern Gujarat, Hyderabad, the Deccan and Aurangabad district. Ground and polished stone implements of the New Stone Age have been found in various regions in India, "their characteristic material being trap in the place of quartzite used in the Old Stone Age."[9] They are of varied forms involving higher techniques than those of the paleolithic tools. They include axes, sticks, stones, polishers, hammer-stones, etc.

Mastering the technique of grinding and polishing, the primitive people began to use more handy and effective stone tools and weapons. They made vessels out of clay and wood. It was in this period that they learnt the use of the bow and arrow as weapons for hunting and self-defence. The discovery of the bow and arrow was of great significance. It enabled the primitive people to hunt more efficiently and wild game became a regular item of food, It also helped in capturing animals alive for domestication.

Even today, there are in many parts of India various tribes who have not yet passed the hunting and food-gathering stage and who use primitive stone implements and the bow and arrow, and lead a life similar to that of the stone age. Ehrenfels considers the Kadar of Cochin as a survival from the oldest known Indian culture. "In olden days" he says, "collecting jungle products and also hunting were the only means to procure the necessities of life for the Kadar, and this is still their main source of income. The vast majority of Kadar still lives by collecting forest products which, however, are being rarely kept for their own exclusive use now) part at least of the collected material being exchanged against rice, chillies, opium, arrack, cloth and ready-made clothes at the contractor's shop."[10]

The primitive peoples of India had no class division among themselves and no monarchical institutions. They were organised into clans and tribes. The

8 Zeuner: *Pre-history in India*, p. 38.

9 V.D. Krishnaswamy: *Stone Age in India.*

10 Ehrenfels: *Kadar of Cochin*, pp. 24-26.

unit of the tribe was the clan or gotra which claimed a common ancestor. Each clan had its own democratic council which elected the chief. The tribe consisted of several clans. Where there were more clans, an intermediate organisation called the phratry took shape. A group of clans formed itself into a phratry and two or more phratries constituted a tribe. The tribe was characterised by a common language or dialect, common religious views and rituals, and common means of production. "The tribal commune," wrote Marx, "or, if one prefers, the primitive herd, based on community of blood, language, customs, etc. is the first condition for the appropriation of the objective necessities of life and for the reproductive and productive activities of its members as herdsmen, hunters, tillers of' the soil etc."

Social groupings based on blood have been found to be the most important social units existing among the primitive tribes. The Kuki tribe of Manipur, for example, is divided into two moieties. Each moiety is divided into two phratries and each such phratry into two clans. The phratries and clans have their respective names. "Among the tribes living in the North-West Frontier area of West Pakistan," writes Tarak Chandra Das, "the members of a clan feel far more closely related. The sense of collective responsibility is so highly developed among them that the action of a single member of a clan may embroil all its other menaces in a life and death struggle with another clan, leading to a blood feud which may continue for years."[11]

A, Aiyappan writes about the Kurichiyas, found in the Wynad Taluk of Kerala: "The Kurichiya territory is divided into several *nads*, and over each *nad* there is a headman. A council of elders presided over by the headman of each *nad* settles communal disputes . . . . For social offences, men and women are often excommunicated."[12] The tribal assembly of the Ulladans in Kerala consists of the elderly members of the tribe. "There is a headman who is called Muppan, and he has an assistant who is known as Ponamban. The headman has to preside at all marriage and funeral ceremonies, and to decide all disputes connected with the tribe."[13]

A comparative study of their mode of life and social relations in the light of the discoveries made by our archaeologists and anthropologists will enable us to learn a good deal about the primitive palaeolithic and neolithic communities who inhabited our land thousands of years before the dawn of civilisation.

11 Tarak Chandra Das: *Adivasis*, p. 100.

12 CA Aiyappan: *Adivasis*, p, 48.

13 L.K. Ananthakrishna lyer: *Tbe Cochin tribes and Castes*, p. 63.

This primitive Indian society was based on the common ownership of the means of production. There was no private production, no private consumption, no private property yet. Everything was owned in common and was for common use. No individual could or did appropriate articles of human consumption as his own private property, and the machinery of the State was unknown. There were no kings or subjects, no exploiters or exploited, no landlords or capitalists, no court or prison houses, no police or armies. Men's relations with one another were governed by the collective nature of production and consumption, Implements were then so crude and production was so poorly developed that people could not exist without joining together against the elemental forces of nature and wild animals. Whatever was produced belonged to each and everyone. The products of the collective labour of all the members of the tribe were consumed collectively; the implements of production were owned collectively, and, therefore, there was no possibility of exploitation of man by man. Such a social order naturally corresponded to the primitive and undeveloped condition of the productive forces. It was not the abundance of produce, but the inadequacy of it that marked this social organisation. It was the extreme backwardness of the processes of production that necessitated collective production and collective consumption of the produce. This social compulsion regulated the relations among men.

It was the advance from stone to metals that paved the way for great changes in the collective life of the ancient peoples. Handicrafts emerged and with them new divisions of labour also appeared. Exchange of products and commodity production became possible. Wealth increased. The increase of production in different branches like cattle-breeding, agriculture and domestic handicrafts enabled human labour to produce more than what was necessary for its maintenance. Private property raised its head within the primitive communist society, based on collective production and collective consumption. Differences as between the rich and the poor appeared and within society some became “haves” and others “have-nots.” The State also then came into existence as the coercive organ of the owning class. The stage of Civilisation was ushered in.

India's leap from the Stone Age to the Bronze Age, from Barbarism to Civilisation, is well indicated in the ruins of Mohenjo-daro and Chandu-daro on the Indus and Harappa on the river Ravi. Harappa is situated nearly 100 miles to the south-west of Lahore and Mohenjo-daro about 100 mitls from Karachi and about 400 mites from Harappa. The three excavated cities lay

far apart and we find that the Indus Valley civilisation spread over an area four times that of Sumer. In addition to the cities, ruins of several villages, big and small, have been dug out. Later excavations showed the presence of a culture of the Mohenjo-daro-Harappa type extending as far as Rangpur and Lothal near Ahmedabad and as far as the Narbada in the South. Wheeler wrote: "Between Rupar, at the foot of the Simla hills and Sutkagendor near the coast of the Arabian Sea, 300 miles west of Karachi, over sixty sites of Harappa culture have been excavated. . . . Recent search has extended the Indus Civilisation far down the West coast, giving the Indus people in the aggregate no less than 800 miles of sea-board, with what bearing upon their maritime activities remains to be explored. In Saurashtra (Kathiawad), extending to the eastern side of the gulf of Cambay, something like forty Harappan sites have been claimed and though some of them may perhaps be more properly described as variant or marginal, there is now no doubt that at least a late phase of the civilisation is widely represented there. The southernmost Indus site at present (1959) known as Bhagatrav is on the Kim estuary nearly 500 mites south-east of Mohenjo-daro, others occur only a little further north at Mehgam and Telod on the estuary of the Narbada."[14]

Some writers claim that this civilisation extended even to South India. But this is not yet substantiated by research findings. It is, however, probable that there were trade relations between the cities of the Indus Valley and those of South India. There is archaeological evidence of Graeco-Roman contact which existed in Arikamedu, Brahmagiri and other sites in South India more than 2000 years ago. It has also been proved that there were trade and maritime contacts between South India and Babylon as early as the 3rd millennium B.C.

Whatever may be the actual extent of the area, there is no doubt that on the plains of the Indus there once flourished one of the three great Bronze Age civilisations of the very ancient East. Sir John Marshall said: "Five thousand years ago, even before the Aryans were heard of, the Punjab and Sind were enjoying an advanced civilisation closely akin but in some respects even superior to that of the contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt. This is what discoveries at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro now place beyond question."[15]

Stuart Piggot is of the opinion that the two cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were the twin capitals of a single Harappan Empire which included a number of provincial townships and fortified villages. Each capital was

14 Sir Mortimer Wheeler: *The Indus Civilisation*, p, 2, London, 1960.

15 Marshall: *Mohenjo Daro*.

dominated by a lofty citadel protected by a massive inner rampart of baked bricks. The cities were built almost entirely of kiln-baked bricks. Baking on such a large scale must have necessitated enormous consumption of fuel, and this meant organised cooperative effort. Collective, systematic efforts were required not only to secure the required firewood but also to control the flood waters.

The Indus Valley Civilization, like the Nilotic and Euphratic Civilisations, was based on irrigated farming. Dams were plentiful, and some of them are still to be found in the western parts of the Punjab. Agriculture was the main vocation of a big section of the population in the Indus Valley. Agricultural implements, mostly made of copper and brass, have been unearthed. The crops were mainly barley, wheat and cotton and the villages produced enough food to feed the population of the cities. After the harvests, there was great rejoicing among the people with songs and dances. Their musical instruments were drums made of wood and leather, similar to those we use in India today, and must have come down to us across the centuries from those ancient times.

Side by side with agriculture certain handicrafts also flourished. Metals like copper and bronze were used for utensils and weapons but along with them stone implements were also used extensively. There was mass production of pottery of standard design. Potters' kilns have been found on the outskirts of the city. The tools and implements - some of which are made of stone, but many are excellent specimens of copper and bronze - were the result of highly specialised techniques. Metallurgists in the Indus cities smelted silver, lead and copper and worked on gold too. Tools and weapons, more primitive than those of Sumer, have been found in the Harappan cities. Chisels, axes, daggers, spears, knives, razors, saws, sickles and arrow-heads made of sheet-copper - all produced by Harappan smiths - have been found in the cities. Childe observes that "the buildings and articles found in them have been produced by specialised craftsmen - brickmakers, carpenters, potters, coppersmiths, glaziers, stone-cutters, goldsmiths and jewellers."[16]

The Indus Valley Civilisation was mainly urban and its wealth came from extensive trade with the outside world. Transport by wheeled vehicles and boats was not unknown. Clay models of two-wheeled carts, tight-cornered weapons, a four-wheeled wagon, and the picture of a boat on a seal have been found among the relics of the cities. The draught animal, it seems, was the humped ox. Our forefathers in the Indus valley were not illiterate. They

16 Childe: Man Makes Himself, p. 134.

had developed a script with about 300 characters, evidently pictographic in origin. Archaeologists have discovered inscriptions on the seals led by the Harappan people, but they have not yet been satisfactorily deciphered, It is remarkable that over such a vast area a homogeneous civilisation with its irrigated farming, handicrafts and trade, sewers and municipal water systems, fortified citadels and two-storied private houses with courtyards and public baths, and musical instruments and pictographic writing, flourished in our country some five thousand years ago. This civilisation was the result of a long process of evolution and progress from savagery and barbarism. The evidence amassed by the archaeologists in regard to the method of production and exchange and even the very planning of the cities seems to suggest the initial stages of a slave-owning society.

The citadel in each capital, it is suggested, was the dwelling of a "ruler" in whose hands the social surplus was concentrated. This concentration of economic power is further attested to by the fact that huge granaries were attached to the citadels.

Spacious double-storied houses of baked bricks, well equipped with many apartments, bath rooms, courtyards, private walls - all stand in contrast to the monotonous rows of small ill-furnished brick houses without gutters and drains or even proper water steeply. The contrast, Childe points out, reflects a division of society into classes. Menial jobs like cleaning of the gutters and roads seem to have been the ordained task of the slaves. These people are described by Mackay as "municipal workers." As in Babylon, Egypt and other ancient countries, in India, too, slaves were put to work on the construction of buildings. "It is probable'" says Colonel Gordon, that slave labour was an important part of the economy and daily life of the Indus civilisation. There is a class of small terracotta which represent squatting, probably male, figures clasping their knees, and these are found in large numbers. At Harappa museum there are 76 of them. Some of these figures have a round cap with prickings all over and a curious collar with a projection in front. It is possible they are slaves."[17]

One of the most intriguing questions in the study of this civilization relates to the exact nature of the state structure and forms of administration. Wheeler is of the view that autocratic rulers controlled the state machinery in ancient India, as in Sumer, Egypt, Akkad, etc. According to him, it was "a theocratic state with a sacred kingship," Childe says: "We have indications of a division into classes of rich and poor, but whether a King or a God stood

17 Colonel D.H. Gordon: The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture, p. 71.

at the head of the hierarchy is uncertain."[18] In Piggot's view the state was controlled by priest-kings with unlimited autocratic powers and rights. But Hewit is of the opinion that groups of five men used to rule the cities, The remnants of this system are still found in the modern Panchayats. Strabo in his *Ancient lndia* and the Sabha Parva of the *Mahabharata* also refer to such a system.

These views are at best suggestions for further research and study to solve this intriguing problem satisfactorily. Perhaps the deciphering of the inscriptions on the wails of the ruined palaces of the Indus valley may throw light on many of these obscure facts.

There is evidence to show that the Indus Valley Civilisation survived till about 1,500 B.C., when the Aryans invaded India and destroyed the ancient towns with fire and sword. There are many references in the Rig Veda to this intervention by the Aryan tribes.

In the Rig Veda, the heroic exploits of the invading Aryans are often attributed to Indra, the chief God in the Aryan pantheon. Indra is invoked again and again to help them conquer the asuras and the dasyus. The asuras and the dasyus, of course, were the people of the Indus Valley. Indra is praised as Asuraghna or the slayer of the asuras and as Purandara, destroyer of the *puras* or fortified towns. It is stated that when he destroyed "the seven fortified towns," Indra crushed the people to his great pleasure and "made to flow the obstructed waters and killed the enemy for the sake of youthful Purukutsa" (Rg. 1.172.2). We learn from the Rig Veda that the Aryan invaders used not only flood waters but also fire for destroying the towns of the Indus people, for plundering their wealth and depriving them of their lands and animals.

The barbarian invaders who sacked the Indus cities called themselves Aryans which meant "noble" or "high-born" because they believed that they were superior to and nobler than the early inhabitants of India whom they conquered. In fact, the new name came to denote the new settlers only after they had fought and defeated the original inhabitants of North-West India. The Aryans called them mlechas or dasyus or dasas. The word *dasa* digitally meaning "enemy," acquired the meaning of "servant" or "slave" only after the Aryans had succeeded in subduing them and making them their servants.

It was not at all easy for the Aryans to defeat and subdue the Indus Valley people and finally establish their domain in India. They had to fight many a

18 Childe: Man Makes Himself, p. 135.

fierce battle with these people before they could occupy the fertile plains of North-West India. The Vedas contain descriptions of these bloody and ruthless wars which ultimately enabled the invaders to convert the north-west of India into Aryavartha, the domain of the Aryans.

The Vedas also contain references to the people who lived in the north-west of India in the early decades of the twentieth century B.C. These people had been divided into visakas or gotras (clans). They were dark-skinned and had flat noses. They had well-built towns and fortresses. There were rich merchants among them who lived in well-furnished mansions. They had fertile lands and knew the techniques of agriculture, spinning and weaving, They made and used earthenware and copper vessels, gold and silver ornaments, and had various weapons made of copper.

The Rig Veda indicates that the culture of the dasyus was of a higher order than that of the Aryans. The dasyu fortresses are described as very strong, and their religious beliefs as highly advanced; for their gods did not in the main represent the natural forces like the gods of the Aryans. They were Siva, the Mother Goddess, the phallus (linga) and the Sacred Bull. The Vedas particularly refer to the dasyus as those who did not recognise or worship the Aryan gods, or give gifts to the priests, or perform sacrifices.

How did the Aryans conquer and subdue this relatively more developed and widespread civilisation which had deep roots in the soil? Childe gives the answer: “With iron weapons a commoner could meet on more equal terms the Bronze Age knight. With them, too, poor and backward people could challenge the armies of civilised states whose monopoly of bronze armaments had made them seem invulnerable. “[19] It seems the invading Aryans were superior in weapons of warfare - coats of mail, iron helmets and armour - and also possessed plenty of well-trained horses and chariots, while the people of the Indus Valley had none of these. It is, therefore, only natural that the pre-Aryan people, though more advanced in culture, could not hold their own against the warlike Aryan tribes.

Even though the original inhabitants of the Indus Valley were defeated by the Aryans, their civilisation which lay sprawling over the vast plains of the Indus and her tributaries and even beyond could not have been destroyed completely. The people of the hinterland seem to have continued their own way of life. Elements of their culture and ideology presumably survived the Aryan occupation. This is indicated by the Rig Veda itself. A study of the Vedic laws helps us to understand not only the social organisation of the

19 Childe: What Happened in History, Penguin edition, p. 163.

Harappan people but also their ideology and world outlook. Since such literary evidence is largely confirmed by the archaeological discoveries in the Indus basin, a comparative study is all the more fascinating.

When they east entered India, the Aryans were in the stage of barbarism, and they met with a comparatively developed and a complex urban civilisation in India. While they destroyed this civilisation, they were themselves considerably influenced by it, and the result was the emergence of a new civilisation. "The Vedic religion," says Radhakrishnan, "absorbed, embodied and preserved the types and rituals of older cults. Instead of destroying them, it adapted them to its own requirements. It took so much from the social life of the Dravidians and other native inhabitants of India that it is very difficult to disentangle the original Aryan elements from others".[20]

What actually happened over a large part of the area was a fusion of the various elements of the two trends, and, in course of time, "more and more of what was non-Aryan came to be not merely tolerated, but welcomed in spite of incongruities, as the non-Aryan element became increasingly predominant in the race mixture."[21]

This assimilation of non-Aryan culture and tradition by the Aryan settlers and the emergence of an Indian culture did not, of course, take place all of a sudden in the early stages. It was a later phenomenon which appeared in the course of a long process of evolution and assimilation and as a result of the radical changes in the economic and social life of the Aryans. Before we go deeper into the nature, processes and results of this cultural fusion, we shall have a glimpse of the social and religious ideas of the pre-Aryan people of India.

20 S. Radhakrishnan: Eastern Religion and Western Thought.

21 Rabindranath Tagore: *A Vision of India's History*, p. 34.

CHAPTER TWO

TOTEM, MAGIC AND RELIGION

In the strict sense of the term, neither philosophy nor religion existed among the primitive peoples in the earliest stage of human society. The food-gathering hunters of the early Stone Age had neither the inclination nor the leisure to be concerned with gods, prayers and worship. The sole impulse that governed their actions was the need to obtain the bare necessities of life. Their chief concern was not the "ultimate being," or "Brahman," but the struggle to live and to secure their food—fruits, edible roots and the flesh of animals. They had no thought at all about the "animalness" in the animal. To them, the animals that they hunted and their primitive weapons were not unknown entities, but objective realities. Considered from this standpoint, the primitive peoples were not idealists or spiritualists, but natural materialists. Practical labour activities at every step went to prove the "materialness" of the natural phenomena, for practical activity rests on the recognition of objective reality. Thus in their day-to-day life pimitive men were always guided by a spontaneous materialist outlook. With each advance in the mastery over nature, their horizons widened, but their knowledge of nature and its properites was very limited. The vast range of natural phenomena was beyond their comprehension and therefore struck them with awe. They were ignorant, too, of the nature of human consciousness and its relation to the material world. This ignorance was responsible for the emergence of magic, totemism, animism and other mystical and religious conceptions of reality, through which they hoped to propitiate the wrath of the unintelligible and inscrutable forces of nature.

At this early stage, however, the primitive people were wholly pre-occupied with the struggle for existence. Mental work could not be separated from physical work. In other words, their material and spiritual life were intertwined.

Engaged as they were in the struggle for survival, even animals, birds and trees appeared to the primitive people as more powerful

than themselves. They, therefore, attributed supernatural and mystic powers to them, and idolized them. Indeed, all objects, all phenomena of nature, were endowed with supernatural properties. This gradually led to the conceptions of an etheral quality in objects in addition to their real nature. This marked the origin of animism and other superstitious beliefs which were, in fact, nothing more than the primitive man's responses to the incomprehensible, mysterious forces of nature.

Tylor defines animism as "the doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general."[1] Elsewhere he observes: "It is habitually found that the theory of animism divides into two great dogmas, forming parts of one consistent doctrine, first concerning souls of individual creatures, capable of continued existence after the death or destruction of the body, second, concerning other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities. Spiritual beings are held to affect or control the events of the material world, and man's life here and hereafter; and it being considered that they hold intercourse with men, and receive pleasure or displeasure from human actions, the belief in their existence leads naturally, and it might almost be said inevitably, sooner or later, to active reverence and propitiation. Thus animism, in its full development, includes the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits; these doctrines practically resulting in some kind of active worship."[2]

Animism corresponded to a low level of development of the productive forces. Ignorant of the true nature of the universe and the physical, physiological and psychological structure of living beings, unable to have any scientific explanation for the causes of birth and death, thoughts and dreams, they came to imagine that feelings, sensations and ideas were the creation of some inexplicable spirit or soul which existed somewhere in the human body and left it at the time of death. This was how the primitive people began to imagine that the world was filled not only with material objects, but also with a spirit-substance or being called soul

[1]Edward Tylor : *Primitive Culture*, Part I, p. 23.

[2]*Ibid.*, Part II, p. 11.

concealed within those material objects, or existing independently of and divorced from them.

The belief that human thoughts, ideas and emotions were supernatural forces independent of the material body, was the basis of rudimentary religious and idealist tendencies among the primitive people. Since the possibility of controlling the forces of nature was beyond them, they naturally sought to propitiate the spirits by song, dances and various kinds of rituals. They invoked the help of supernatural forces and spirits to supplement human efforts and overcome human limitations and the inadequacy of the technique of production. They worshipped trees, snakes, wild beasts and all sorts of spirits, including the spirits of their ancestors. The idea of rebirth and transmigration of souls, the cult of heroes and of ancestors and the belief in an after-life were the outcome of such primitive ideas and practices.

Remnants of such ideas and practices can be observed even today among various sections of the people in India. The spirits of the dead are supposed to produce good or evil, health or ill-health and various kinds of rituals are practised to propitiate them. This can be observed in its crudest form among the various hill tribes of the country, some of whom still live as food-gatherers and hunters. The Kanikkar of Kerala, for example, worship 150 Valia Chavukal (*i.e.* big ancestor spirits) and 10 Cheria Chavukal (small ancestor spirits). The Malan Kuravas, Malavetas and many other tribes also worship the spirits and other deities in order to cure diseases like small-pox and to ensure better crops, health and happiness. Sacrifices of fowls, goats and other creatures are considered to be the most potent way to propitiate the deity or the spirit.

The objects of worship were not abstract gods but demons, which were supposed to be cruel, vengeful and capricious, with a liking for blood sacrifices and wild dances. Claudwell, who made an attempt to investigate, on the basis of philology, the primitive Dravidian beliefs, observes : "The officiating magician or priest excites himself to frenzy and then pretends or supposes himself to be possessed by the demon to which worship is being offered, and whilst in this state he communicates to those who consult him the information he has received."

The cult of the dead prevalent among the ancient peoples, their funeral customs and rituals were associated with the notion of a life which continued even after death. "Continuation of consciousness after death, in some form or other," says Ehrenfels, "appears to be part of the general belief among Kadar....The belief in a post-mortal existence somewhere in the sky is widespread."[3]

Describing the burial customs of certain tribes of Kerala, K. Mammen points out: "Burial is resorted to with a view to avoiding the terror felt by the living for the spirit of the dead and the fear that it may return to alarm the surviving fellow tribesmen: betal, rice, etc. are put into the mouth of the corpse to appease the soul of the departed. A thorn is pinned to the grave at each end and the middle to cow down the spirit of the deceased."[4]

Such beliefs and practices in varying degrees may be observed among the primitive tribes in other parts of the country also. They arose from their imagination that their feelings, sensations and thoughts were not the products of their own consciousness, but of a separate entity called soul which inhabits the body and leaves it at death. That is how they came to believe in the possibility of a life of the spirit outside matter and offered sacrifices to propitiate it.

The totem was another form of religion which was very popular among the primitive tribes. George Thomson defines totemism as the "magico-religious system characteristic of tribal society." The basic characteristic of totemism consists in the belief in the common origin of the ancestral groups and clans related to some animal, plant or natural phenomenon which is called a totem. It reflects the material life of the primitive hunting tribes in which people were related with one another on the basis of kinship. Totemism consisted of elaborate social relations. Thomson maintains that the terms of relationship such as father, sister, and uncle can be understood only in terms of totemic relationship.

Each tribe was divided into several clans. The clans had distinguishing emblems or banners and nomenclature bearing the

[3]Ehrenfels: *Kadar of Cochin*, p. 170.

[4]K. Mammen: *Kerala Culture*.

names of animals, plants, birds or inamimate objects, but never of persons. The conditions of material life attached the primitive people to the surrounding world of animals and plants. They believed that they had blood relationship with animals, birds or plants. They regarded themselves "as akin to their totem species and as descended from it."[5]

A totem was an object of religious reverence. Special powers were ascribed to it. It was sacred, and people were forbidden to eat it. The taboo on bison flesh, for example, is scrupulously kept by the Kadar. "This disgust of the bison," says Ehrenfels, "is also being extended, by Kadar, to the domestic buffalo. Buffalo milk is being refused by many Kadar, and they would not touch a pair of buffaloes which a shikari from the eastern plains had brought up as a bait for tigers."[6]

Marriages between members of the same clan were forbidden. This helped to crystallize the clans. Totemism acted as a unifying force among primitive tribesmen. As John Lewis points out, "it not only provides the clan with its name but also becomes an outward sign of an inward force that sanctifies their unity." Totemic beliefs and totemic rites "serve to organize the relations of human social groups to their environment and at the same time act as a symbolic affirmation of the collective moral sentiments upon the acceptances of which the unity of society rests."[7] Thus the totem becomes the centre and symbol of clan solidarity. When the members of the clan "identify themselves with their totem, do not kill, eat or touch it, regard it as kin, and do not marry persons with the same clan-name, they strengthen the sense of clan kinship, and thus of clan solidarity, and so fulfil their cravings for complementarity in and through the clan by an act of dependence and surrender."[8]

Remnants of totemism as a social system can be found to exist in many parts of the country even today. It denotes not only a feature of religious beliefs but the social organization of these peoples.

[5]George Thomson: *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, p. 36.
[6]Ehrenels: *Kadar of Cochin*, p. 180.
[7]John Lewis: *The Religions of the World Made Simple*, p. 21
[8]J.V. Ferreire: *Totemism in India*, p. 52.

Magic was another form of primitive religion which arose in the Stone Age when people were helpless before the menacing phenomena of nature which they could neither understand nor investigate. They attributed supernatural powers to natural phenomena and tried to influence them through magic. In their ignorance and incapacity to save themselves successfully from real dangers, they used imaginary supernatural properties of things, creatures, gestures and words. They believed that incantation, invocation, exorcism, dance, sacrifices and other rituals would influence natural phenomena, and would not only bring success to them in hunting but save them from sickeness, famine, storms, plagues and other catastrophies. The development of agriculture in the New Stone Age led to new forms of magical rites and rituals. The neolithic people were more concerned with crops than with hunting, and this change had its effect on their mental activities also. Magical rites were performed at the time of ploughing, sowing and harvest, for rain and riches. "The influence of rain on vegetation," writes Bernal, "noticed in the days of hunting culture only indirectly through its effects on animal life, now became a matter of life and death. Imitative magic to produce rain became the other main object of ritual....Regular spring and harvest festivals were celebrated."[9] All these magical rites were connected with the practical activities of the people and at their root lay the idea that definite actions would bring definite results. "Magic," says George Thomson, "rests on the principle that by creating the illusion that you control reality you can actually control it. In its initial stages it is simply mimetic. You want rain, so you perform a dance in which you mimic the gathering clouds, the thunder clap and the falling shower. You enact in fantasy the fulfilment of the desired reality."[10]

Magic thus arose from primitive man's helplessness in the struggle against the forces of nature. It was, in fact, no substitute for technology, but only its supplement. Primitive people knew the effects of their own labour, and it was only where knowledge failed that magic was resorted to. Magic rites and ceremonies

[9]G.D. Bernal: *Science in History*, p. 65.

[10]George Thomson: *Studies in Ancient Greek Society.*

were supposed to bring supernatural powers to supplement the inadequate techniques of production. As Malinowski observes: "Primitive man cannot manipulate the weather. Experience teaches him that rain and sunshine, wind, heat and cold, cannot be produced by his own hand, however much he might think about or observe such phenomena. He, therefore, deals with them magically."[11]

Sir James Frazer maintains that magic and religion are entirely different and even contradictory concepts. According to him, the fundamental conception of magic is identical with that of modern science, for magic, too, like science is based on the operation of immutable laws of nature. He says: "Thus in so far as religion assumes the world to be directed by conscious agents who may be turned from their purpose by persuasion, it stands in fundamental antagonism to magic as well as to science, both of which take for granted that the course of nature is determined, not by the passion or caprice of personal beings, but by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically. In magic, indeed, the assumption is only implicit, but in science it is explicit."[12]

Frazer arrived at this conclusion because he assumed that the conceptions of God, soul and the other world were conspicuously absent in magic. Religion was characterised by a belief in gods and the practice of prayer to propitiate them and win their favour. He defines religion as "propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life," while magic is based on the belief that "the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result."

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya follows Frazer uncritically and asserts that magic is opposed to spiritualism and religion and that "the world outlook of the primitive pre-class society was pre-spiritualistic and in this sense, proto-materialistic."[13] He says: "Just as the state power emerged on the ruins of the preclass primitive communism, so also the spiritualistic ideas emerged in the

[11]Malinowski: *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*, p. 198.

[12]Frazer: *Magic and Religion*, pp. 83-84.

[13]Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya: *Lokayata*, pp. 96, 228-29.

human consciousness on the ruins of the primitive pre-spiritualistic ideology....The nature of this pre-spiritualistic ideology was materialistic or at least proto-materialistic, that is, Lokayata, in the sense in which we have understood it."[14]

But this is not so. Religion is not merely a belief in God or gods and prayer. Religion in its widest sense is the totality of human relations, actions, objects and ideas embodied in a belief in the supernatural. Belief in the supernatural is the essential characteristic of all religions, and is their basis. Thus, a belief in supernatural punishment for violation of a taboo makes it something religious. Belief in the supernatural properties of a material object transforms it into an object of religious worship. The same is the case with magic. Its supernatural powers are attributed to man—magician, priest or clergyman—who also thus becomes an object of religious reverence. Magic, animism, totemism, etc. are therefore inalienable parts of religion. To isolate any of these elements into a separate category and divorce it from religion would lead one to wrong conclusions. An examination of the remnants of magical rituals which exist in our own day among the various underdeveloped peoples will show that magic cannot be separated from religion.

This does not at all mean that primitive magic and totemism and modern religions as we have understood them are of the same nature. Modern religions, Thomson observed, have "*advanced* forms of worship," while "totemism differs from *mature* religion in that no prayers are used, only commands."[15]

To say that magic is the forerunner of science is also untenable. Belief in magical powers was not the result of knowledge but of ignorance and superstition. History shows that science arose precisely in the process of fighting against false conceptions of nature, against rituals, magic and other superstitions. Engels wrote:

"As to the realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air —religion, philosophy, etc.—these have a prehistoric stock, found already in existence by and taken over in the historical period,

[14]*Ibid*, p. 127.

[15]G. Thomson: *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, I, pp. 49-50, London, 1949.

of what we should today call bunk. These various false conceptions of nature, of man's own being, of spirits, magic forces, etc. have for the most part only a negative economic element as their basis. The low economic development of the prehistoric period is supplemented and also partially conditioned and even caused by the false conceptions of nature. And even though economic necessity was the main driving force of the progressive knowledge of nature and has become even more so, it would surely be pedantic to try and find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense. The history of science is the history of the gradual clearing away of this nonsense or rather of its replacement by fresh, but always less absurd, nonsense."[16]

Thus, side by side with the instinctive materialistic views of the primitive man, "religious" cults of animism, nature-worship, totemism, magic and spirit-worship also played an important role. On one side, there were elemental materialist tendencies necessitated by man's physical labour, his practical activities and his struggle with natural forces and ferocious animals. On the other side, there were religious and idealistic tendencies and superstitions, which were an expression of his inability and helplessness before the incomprehensible forces of nature. Both these tendencies may be witnessed in the ideology of the primitive peoples of India.

With the development of productive forces, especially with the advance in the technique of agriculture, both materialist and religious notions of the early period underwent drastic changes. On the one hand, man's knowledge about his surroundings and nature increased. On the other hand, new gods and new forms of worship emerged.

No temple as a special place for worship has been discovered in the Indus Valley. The religious relics of those ancient days exist mostly in the form of seals, figurines of terracotta and stone images which throw some light on the beliefs and customs of the people. The female figurines discovered in numerous houses in Mohenjo-daro and Harappa reveal the nature of the religious beliefs in ancient India when agriculture had already begun to play

[16]Engels: *Letter to C. Schmidt*, Oct. 27, 1890.

an important part in social life. They indicate that the workship of the Mother-Goddess was widespread.[17] Some male images have also been discovered, and from this archaeologists infer that the worship of Siva or Pasupati (Lord of the Beasts) was prevalent. The *linga* or phallus was another object of worship. Besides these, the people of the Indus Valley continued to worship trees (especially the pipal tree), rivers, fish, serpents, fire, rain and various animals like the tiger, elephant, buffalo and the bull. All these were considered sacred objects of worship, but the worship of goddesses predominated.

This predominance of goddesses corresponded to a stage of social evolution when primitive agricultural matriarchy prevailed. The remnants of this primitive worship of goddesses like Kali and Bhagavati still exist in various parts of the country. In states like Kerala, where the old matriarchal system has not completely vanished, worship of Bhagavati is more popular than in many other parts of India.

Phallus worship was probably a survival of the primitive cult of fertility which existed in the neolithic age. "The chief concern of the neolithic community," wrote Bernal, "was with crops. Accordingly, the woman's side of the totemic rituals for increase and reproduction of plants was emphasised and further developed. The most characteristic were fertility rites, in which human matings were used to encourage the crops."[18] The primitive people believed that there was some invisible relation between the corn-bearing earth and the child-bearing women and that these two phenomena influenced each other.

The early Aryan often made contemptuous references to the phallus worship which prevailed among the non-Aryans. "Let those whose deity is the phallus not penetrate our sanctury," they prayed (R. VII.21.50). But it cannot be denied that even this kind of worship served the Indus Valley people as a means to increase their agricultural production. It was at a time when the

[17]Marshall says: "That, like the Mother-Goddesses of Western Asia, they originated in a matriarchal state of society is a highly reasonable supposition."

[18]J.D. Bernal: *Science in History*, p. 65.

people of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa with their animism and worship of goddesses and the phallus were consolidating their civilization that the Aryans came with their Indra, Varuna and Agni. However, the Aryans themselves, after the lapse of a few centuries, adopted many of the religious customs and beliefs of the original inhabitants of India. The religion of the Indus people, therefore, was "the lineal progenitor of Hinduism." Wheeler wrote : "The later Hindusim, in spite of its Aryan garb, did in fact retain not a little of the non-Aryan Harappan mentality and relationships, perhaps to a far greater extent than can now be proved. The recurrent figures of a proto-Siva, seated in sinister state or possibly dancing as triumphant Nataraja, the evidence of Phallus worship, of reverence paid to animals, particularly of the cult of the bull, have nothing to do with Vedic faith but anticipate dominant elements of the historic Brahminism."[19]

[19]Sir Mortimer Wheeler: *The Indus Civilization*, p. 102, London, 1960.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BEGINNINGS OF PHILOSOPHY

THE early Aryans were not hermits and sages who lived in isolation from mundane material life always meditating on the supreme "Brahman." They were engaged not so much in the quest of a life after death as in the search for the means to improve their living conditions. They accepted life in its fullness and variety and did not reject things that were worldly. They armed themselves, not with mystic contemplation and asceticism, but with bows and arrows and other sharp weapons. They were not subjective indealists, but hard-headed realists. Reading and writing were yet unknown to them. They did not have a script and an alphabet, unlike the pre-Aryan inhabitants of India. They had not outgrown the stage of barbarism. But they loved life. Indeed, it was the passion for life, the eagerness to survive and progress, which steeled them to face any difficulty. They attacked the dasyus, stormed their citadels, and looted their cattle and wealth. They had learnt to tame and ride horses which were often used in the battles they fought. Their bows and arrows were superior to those of their enemies. The Rig Veda contains many stanzas indicating the great faith of the Aryans in the efficacy of their weapons. These stanzas indeed reveal a materialist spirit and an irrepressible urge to move forward in spite of obstacles and to win the battle for an earthly life.

With crude implements of production and with a confidence born out of collective labour, the primitive Aryans set out on their difficult journey of life. But wild animals and the incomprehensible forces of nature confronted them. It was beyond their power to understand the phenomena of nature or to exploit them for their needs. The sun and the moon, light and darkness, flood and drought, lightning and thunder, life and death—everything seemed to be hostile and menacing. To all these incomprehensible phenomena of nature they attributed divinity.

Ignorant of the laws of nature and society, the early Aryans fell a prey to superstitions, unscientific and mythologycal concepts of

reality. The external terrestrial forces which controlled their daily life assumed the form of supernatural forces. This was how gods like Indra, Varuna and Surya came on the scene and exerted a powerful influence on the everyday life of the primitive Aryans who endowed them with their own qualities, their own ambitions and emotions and the great powers they themselves desired to possess. In short, they conceived their gods in their own image. This was how the Vedic gods originated.

The task of defeating the non-Aryans who were living in a more advanced civilization was by no means an easy one. So they turned to the gods for help and prayed for victory in the battles. The Rig Veda abounds in such prayers. Here is one:

"The evil-doing dasyu is around us, senseless,
Keeping false laws, inhuman;
Oh ! slayer of enemies, batter the weapon of the dasa."
(Rig Veda X. 22.8)

Indra was believed to be the god who assisted men to defeat and destroy their enemies. He represented valour, strength and heroism. He is portrayed as destroying enemies, splitting mountains, annihilating the dasyus. Indra was the protector of the Aryan's colour and the slayer of the dark-skinned. And it was to Indra that prayers were offered before and during a battle:

"Indra ! unruffled and unperturbed, Thou
Aimed the shining sword
Of thunder and lightning against the enemy hordes,
And the very peaks of heaven shook !
Thou, thyself struck Sambara and cut him into two!"

This description of the powers of Indra is often accompanied by an invocation for his blessings, as in the following stanzas :

"Indra, give us immortality and joy,
Give us tempered strength to destroy enemies !
Make us prosperous and protect us !
Protect the learned ! Bestow good progeny
And plentiful food on us !"

"Go forward, be bold and fight !
Thy thunderbolt cannot be subdued
Indra, manliness thy strength !
Strike the power of evil, win the waters
After acclaiming thy own royal sway."

(R. VI. 80.3)

Varuna, another captain in the battalion of the Aryan gods was also powerful and strong. For it was he who lifted up the sky to separate heaven and earth! Rivers flew into the sea, but the ocean never overflowed. This again showed the power of Varuna! In the Rig Veda, Varuna is pictured as the god who guided and controlled the destiny of the world.

"Varuna has spread the vista in forests,
Put vigour in houses, milk in the kine;
Set wise instincts in hearts, fire in the waters,
The sun in heaven and "soma" on the mountains."

(R. V. 85.2)

Another god of great importance to the Aryans was Agni, the god of fire:

"O, effulgent one, thou hast made the sun
ageless start to mount the sky
Conferring light on men,
Thou, O effulgent one, art the people's light;
Best and dearest art thou by our side;
Think of the singer, give him life."

(R. X. 150.5)

"Thou, god Agni, art protector of the body, protect my lord
Thou art bestower of long life, bestow on me long life,
Thou art bestower of intellectual brilliance; bestow on me intellectual brilliance!
Oh god ! whatever is wanting in my body, make that up for me."

(Yaj. 3.17)

The Vedic Aryans looked to their gods, not only for courage and strength to face their enemies but also to endow them with an

abundance of the good things of life. The gods were invoked for material welfare and happiness, for prosperity and longevity, for rain, food, health, cattle and children:

"O, god ! give strength to our bodies,
Strength to our draught bulls,
Strength to our progeny, to our descendants,
that they may live ;
For thou art bestower of strength."

(R. III.53.28)

"Oh god! bestow on us the best treasures,
Efficient minds and good fortune:
Increase of wealth and the health of bodies,
Sweetness of speech and the fairness of days."

(R. II.21.6)

The Vedas reveal a subtle combination of naive materialism and idealism. On the one hand nature is idolized, but on the other, gods are supposed to have power over human beings. This power, however, is neither brutal nor tyrannical, which became the case at a later stage under Brahminism. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, the Vedic hymns were the "poetic testament of a people's collective reaction to the wonder and awe of existence—a people of vigorous and unsophisticated imagination awakened to the dawn of mivilization, to the sense of inexhaustible mystery that is implicit in life. It was their simple faith that attributed divinity to every element and force of Nature, but it was a brave and joyous one, in which fear of the gods was balanced by trust in them, in which the sense of mystery only gave enchantment to life, without weighing it down with bafflement."[1]

The religion of the pre-class Aryan society known as the Vedic religion, is a complex system of beliefs and rituals. It was a primitive form of nature worship. The Rig Veda is a collection of panegyric hymns and prayers to different deities who were mainly personifications of the powers of nature. There were mainly three classes of gods—the celestial, the atmospheric and the terre-

[1]Nicol Macnicol: *Hindu Scriptures*, Foreword by Rabindranath Tagore.

strial. Gods like Dius, Varuna, Mitra, Saviter, Aswini and Aditi belonged to the first group. Indra, Vayu, Rudra and Parjanya were atmospheric gods with all the attributes of man. Agni, Soma and the River Saraswathi belonged to the group of terrestrial deities.

It is significant that the Vedas never mention Shiva. Nor do we see them worshipping mother-goddesses or the phallic symbol. Scholars generally regadrd these gods and goddesses as pre-Aryan, aboriginal deities who were taken over by the Aryans at a later stage. "Shiva as depicted at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro," Childe points out, "is generally regarded as an aboriginal deity taken over by the invading Vedic Aryans and verbally identified with the unimportant Vedic Prajapati. The spirits and female deities played a negligible role in Vedic mythology and phallism is unmentioned —all have been regarded by European scholars as post-Vedic accretions in Brahminism."[2]

The Aryans adopted the pre-Aryan gods and goddesses as their own ; and the pre-Aryans, in their turn, began to recognise the Vedic gods. But many centuries elapsed before cordial relations between the pre-Aryan and Aryan gods could be established.

While the early gods like Indra, Mitra and Varuna helped the ancient Aryans to feel themselves at home and commune with the forces of nature they tended to recede into the background with the progress in technology. The social organisation of the primitive communist stage of development was based on ganas and gotras —the clans and tribes. The structure underwent many changes later on, and social groupings uniting many classes within definite territorial boundaries came into being. The new consciousness of unity that came as a result of the changes had its reflection in matters of faith. Amidst the plethora of gods, the concept of and faith in a single God struck root and emerged as a powerful new trend in Aryan thought. As the Satapatha Brahmana has pointed out, "the gods acted in the same manner as men."

In other words, along with the centralisation in social and state structure, the gods were also unified. The heavenly counterpart of an earthly emperor, the king of kings, was the single supreme being,

[2]Childe: *New Light on the most Ancient East*, p. 185.

the God of all gods. Different gods on different occasions were exalted to the position of omnipotent super-gods, the creators and preservers of the universe. This or that god invoked was conceived as the only god who was supposed to have the attributes of all other gods. These changing concepts had manifested already during the later stages of the Rig Veda as could be seen from the following :

"One is Agni kindled in many a spot ;
One is Surya shining over all;
One is Ushas illumining all this
That which is one has become this all."

(R. VIII. 58.2)

"Agni is but that, Aditya is that
Vayu is that, Chandramas is that,
Light is that, Brahman is that,
Apoh (water) are these, Prajapati is he."

(Yajur Veda: 32.1)

The diverse gods like Agni, Surya and Yama are now recognised as manifestations of one and the same God. "They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni and yet it is the heaven-winged bird garutman. To the one the singers give many names, call it Agni, Yama, Matarishvan." (R. I.164.46)

By the time of the end of the Vedas, the unity of the universe was visualised, the idea of the Supreme being had emerged completely and the earlier deities had become subject to its will. In fact, most of the Vedic gods lay in neglect, some completely forgotten, while a few continued to have nominal recognition, though divested of all divine attributes. For instance, Indra had been known as the Lord of lightning and thunder, the destroyer of cities (*Purandara*), he who commanded rains, bestowed good crops and protected cattle. But with the changes in concepts he became the Lord of the fighters, the kshatriyas. Kings were considered to be the descendants of Indra. Ultimately, however, Indra was reduced to the status of a *dikpalaka*[3] of the single Supreme God.

[3]The dikpalakas were the governors of the eight cardinal points in space.

The Vedas bear testimony to the ceaseless effort of our ancient philosophers to understand the mysteries of nature and to comprehend the relations between man and nature. This was of course motivated by the desire to gain knowledge, which could help make their lives meaningful, complete and joyous.

There are a few poems in the Rig Veda that are of interest from a philosophical point of view. They relate to the formation of the world. In one poem it is depicted as a transformation of the Absolute, conceived as a person "with a thousand heads and a thousand eyes and a thousand feet which expanded with the food offered at the rituals." The evolved world is supposed to be part of this Absolute person. The Universe was described as the myth of the cosmic Man of gigantic proportions. The sky was his head, the sun his eye, the earth his feet, the wind his breath and stars his hair. The world was only one-fourth of his body. "The Purusha alone is all this universe, what has been, and what is to be." (R. X.90.) The idea is that the whole world is derived from the sacrifice of the *Purusha* regarded as the first cause, the material source, of the Universe.

Another poem has it that the world has arisen from the Hiranya-garbha who held up the heaven and the earth. In another verse Prajapati is glorified. In still another, Visvakarman, a god of the same type as Hiranya-garbha, is hailed as the architect of the world.

According to many verses in the Vedas, the world is real and it originated from reality. There are verses which trace the basis of the world to five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether. "In their search for the first ground of all changing things," says Radhakrishnan, "they, like the ancient Greeks, looked upon water, air, etc. as the ultimate elements out of which the variety of the world is composed."[4] The world was thus not the creation of a Supreme God or Brahman but the result of a long process of development without any interference from an outside agency. Gods were born after the creation of the world and derived their being from the elements. In the beginning there was neither a

[4]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1.

non-being nor a being. It was all darkness encompassed in darkness. The world evolved from this primal state. First there was only mist, then smoke, then arose the sun, air, fire, lightning, moon, and so on. The world was thus definitely material and God had no place in its evolution.

The famous "Hymn of Creation" is a grand testimony to the spirit of inquiry of the early Aryans:

"Non-being then existed not, nor being:
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it,
What was concealed? Wherein? In Whose protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water?
Death then existed not, nor life immortal:
Of neither night nor day was any token.
By its inherent force the One breathed windless;
No other thing than that beyond existed.
Darkness there was at first by darkness hidden;
Without distinctive marks, this all was water.
That which becoming, by the void was covered,
That one by force of heat came into being.
Desire entered the One in the beginning;
It was the earliest seed, of thought the product.
The sages searching in their hearts, with wisdom,
Found out the bond of being in non-being.
Their ray extended light across the darknes;
But was the One above or was it under?
Creative force was there, and fertile power ;
Below was energy, above was impulse.
Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after this world's creation.
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?
None knoweth whence creation has arisen;
And whether he has or has not produced it;
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He only knows, or haply he may know not."[5]

[5]R· X. 29

Commenting on this beautiful poem, Dr. Kunhan Raja wrote: "Here we find no trace of self, distinct from matter, and what we find is only the infinite that became diversified into matter and activity in the empirical world; the life principle, as an absolute reality was there in that infinite. The atheism is very patent and this is the atheism of the Samkhya system ; there is no creator for the world process. The evolution is from within some infinite, which infinite contains within itself the powers of life or the evolution of the world with change and movement."[6]

It is explicitly stated in the above hymn that "the Gods were born after this world's creation." Then, whence came this creation? Even he who is in the highest heaven may not know it. Then who possibly knows?

The early Aryan thinkers raised these and similar questions and tried to find satisfactory answers. What is the universe? How did it come into being? What power is behind it? Is there anything unchanging and permanent beyond the changing world around us? These were indeed the ultimate riddles which baffled the Aryan mind. But they would not give up. With their keen sense of wonder they kept observing the phenomena of life and nature, inquiring, speculating. Nothing remained static and changeless. The sun rose and set. There was thunder and lightning. The rains poured. Men came into being and passed away. Was there any particular method in this seeming fantasy? What was the difference between sleep and wakefulness? Could death be conquered and life made eternal? Wherein lay the distinction between the lifeless body and a living body? Could there be a life after death? How was man related to the world around him? Such were the qustions that the early Aryans asked themselves again and again ; and the Vedic literature reflected that ceaseless quest. One poet put it thus:

"What thing I am, I know not !
With the secret power of the mind I wander."

In various parts of the Rig Veda we read hymns which reflect

[6]Dr. C. Kunhan Raja : *Poet-Philosophers of the Rig Veda*, p. 230.

doubt and scepticism concerning the existence of gods. "One and another say, there is no Indra, who hath beheld him," says one of the rishis (VIII. 89). The following hymn to Indra is another example:

"Of him the terrible they ask,
'Where is he?'
Of him, indeed, they also say, "He is not"
The foemen's wealth, like players' stakes, he lessens;
Believe in him ; for he, men, is Indra.

(R. II. 12)

Again : 'Who is Indra ? Whoever saw him?
One to another they say, there is no Indra.
Whom then shall we worship ?

(R. II. 125 ; VIII. 103.3)

On these and other similar hymns Radhakrishnan comments as follows :

"The questioning mood asserted itself very often. Scepticism was in the air. The Indian of this period—as seen in hymns quoted above, *e.g.* X.129—wondered about his Gods and about the possibility of knowing the ultimate source of all things, but his doubt often took the form of ridicule of accepted beliefs and of his gods. Even the very existence of his highest gods was questioned. He even offered up a prayer for faith, and a prayer to make us faithful is not possible in a time of unshaken faith."[7]

Books were unknown to the early Aryans. They learnt the hymns and prayers by rote and the purohits transmitted them orally to their pupils and successors. This transmission of Vedic mantras by word of mouth went on from generation to generation. The Vedas as we know them today are in fact only a compilation of these hymns and mantras. As Macdonnell has pointed out, "some hundreds of years must have been needed for all the hymns found in the Rig Veda to come into being."

[7]Radhakrishnan and Moore : *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, p. 34.

The Vedas thus can be said to have developed in two stages. The first stage was that of their gradual composition by the various purohits and sages over the years, and the second of the compilation of those scattered hymns into four compact groups or samhitas—Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. Of these, the Rig Veda is the oldest, the largest and the most important. As Winternitz has suggested, "centuries must have elapsed between the composition of the earliest hymns and the compilation of the samhita of the Rig Veda."

Max Muller holds, on the basis of religious and literary evidence, that the primitive hymns of the Rig Veda belonged to the period between 1,200 B.C. and 1,000 B.C., and the later portions between 1,000 B.C. and 800 B.C. Rapson also suggests that the most ancient hymns of the Rig Veda date from a period at least 1,200 years before the Christian era.[8] According to Radhakrishnan, there is evidence to indicate with some certainty that the hymns were current fifteen centuries before Christ.[9].

It is probable that some of the hymns of the Rig Veda were composed by the Aryans prior to their migration into India in the middle of the second millennium B.C., but most of them were created after their invasions of North-West India and their migration towards the East. The Sama Veda Samhita is a collection of hymns mostly taken from the Rig Veda for being sung at sacrificial ceremonies. Yajur Veda Samhita also is a collection of sacrificial formulas used for liturgical purposes. Atharva Veda Samhita, the last of the collections, is mainly a collection of spells, charms and incantations. It was composed most probably at the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium B.C., i.e. by about 1,000 B.C. or a little later.

In the very early days there were no places like temples specially built for worship. A separate priestly class had not yet come into being. The people lighted their own sacrificial fire for achieving happiness and wealth. But the growth of the productive forces gradually led to differentiations in society. When society was divided into classes, the richer sections of the population began to

[8]E. G. Rapson: *Ancient India*, p. 5.

[9]Radhakrishnan: *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, p. 3.

engage priests proficient in the chanting of hymns for performance of rites and sacrifices on a large scale. A surplus in production enabled the priests to live on the labour of others. Thus a separate class of professional priests, specially trained in the performance of religious rites, came into being.

These priests, known as Brahmins, thus became the dominant and most influential section in the early Aryan society. Even the chieftains and kings subsequently exercised their authority with the blessings of the brahmin priests, who bestowed religious sanctity on the institution of kingship. By this time, in the place of the simple and unostentatious recitation of hymns and prayers to the mythological gods, a complex system of ceremonies and sacrificial rites had come into vogue. Religious rituals and sacrifices became necessary not only for prosperity in cattle-breeding and agriculture or for victory in wars, but also for the maintenance and security of the new social structure.

The original aim of the Vedic ritual was not the attainment of of moksha (salvation) or the realisation of Brahman. It was to secure the good things of life—children, wealth, cattle and the like, or to exterminate the enemy. The gods worshipped were the ordinary elements of nature and the offerings given to the gods were milk, ghee, grain and soma. But in course of time the ritual became an institution in itself.

A yajna or sacrificial rite performed in the proper manner and accompanied by the chanting of mantras without any error was supposed to be sufficient for the attainment of one's desired object. Thus slowly a superstitious faith in elaborate ceremonials, rituals and sacrificial rites obsessed the mind of the people. Purohits (brahmin priests) who presided over the performance of these yajnas and who gave instructions for the correct chanting of mantras, became more and more powerful. Angiras, Bharadvaja, Kanva, Vasishta and other rishis (sages) were the prominent purohits of the time. The lavish offerings and gifts made to the purohits made them very affluent. Performance of yajnas enabled them to accumulate more and more wealth in their hands, and by playing on the religious sentiment of the masses they acquired a dominant hold on society.

In the Sathapatha Brahmana we find the following :

> "Verily there are two kinds of gods. The gods are, of course, gods. The Brahmins, who have learned and who teach the sacred mantras are the gods in human form. Yajnas are of two kinds. The sacrificial offerings to fire are offerings to the god. The gifts and offerings made to the Brahmins, who learn and teach the holy mantras are the yajnas to the human gods."

Along with the propitiation of gods, magical rites also continued to exist. Magical forecast of the weather, prayer for rain, sacrifices for success in harvests, magical rituals for victory in wars—all these became part of religion.

The Atharva Veda contains many magic hymns, magic rites and magic formulas. There were charms to heal a broken bone, to destroy hostile priests, to improve the crops, to end sterility and even to grow hair. It was in fact a synthesis of the Vedic traditions of the early Aryans with the primitive beliefs of the pre-Aryan people of India. Several scholars have pointed out that the Atharva Veda is a book of magic. Keith, for instance, is of the view that the Vedic sacrifice is full of magical elements and that "in some cases it is impossible not to feel that the rite is merely magic dressed up with sacrifice."

The Brahmanas which followed the Samhitas denote the second stage of development of Vedic literature. They deal with the details of sacrificial rites, the specific duties and rules of conduct, and the mystic meanings of the sacrificial ceremonies. It was in the period of the Brahmanas that magic rituals and sacrificial ceremonies became predominant. They were believed to have the power of influencing gods and the course of earthly events and producing the desired result without godly intervention.

The simple rites of the early Vedic Aryans reflected their ignorance of the real cause of natural phenomena. But the ritualism of the Brahmanas acquired certain social attributes also. They helped the brahmin priestly class to keep the masses ignorant of the real cause of social phenomena. The priestly rituals were so expensive that only kings and the richer sections of society could

indulge in them. The ordinary people were satisfied with simpler rites and ceremonies which were a modification of primitive animism and magic rites.

There were contradictions and differences among the richer sections themselves. The brahmin class who amassed by means of yajnas the lion's share of the products of labour became a hindrance to the further progress of society in general and the development of trade in particular. This led to an intensification of the struggle between the brahmins on the one hand and the kshatriyas and vaisyas on the other.

Thus, the Brahmanas reflect the beginnings of a crisis in the simple Vedic religion and its replacement by early Brahminism with its priestcraft and dogmatic ritualism. Early Brahminism was, in fact, a reflection of the primitive character of the social relations of Varnashrama slavery which began to appear in India in the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Along with the development and spread of this slavery, Brahminism also extended its influence. This happened in the period when numerous small kingdoms like Magadha, Kosala, etc. were being formed out of the ruins of the old tribal system.

It was also in this period that the concluding portions of the Vedas known as the Aranyakas and the Upanishads appeared. Aranyakas or forest treatises were appendages to the Brahmanas and dealt with spiritual and mystic interpretations of the Vedic rituals and ceremonies. The Upanishads, in a general sense, are a continuation of the Vedas and are know as the Vedanta or the concluding portions of the Vedas. In content, however, they indicate a new direction in the development of philosophy. It was the period when, side by side with religious rituals, speculative philosophic thought began to bloom in India.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE UPANISHADS

WHILE the Brahmanas were the creation of brahmin priests, the Upanishads contained philosophic speculations in which kshatriyas also played a prominent part. The Upanishads correspond to a period in which the different varnas were taking shape and the tribes were being consolidated and formed into states. It was the kshatriyas who played a dominant part in the formation of kingdoms although they were supported by the brahmins. Many kings of the Upanishadic era appear as friends and patrons of philosophers. We find king Janaka of the Videhas befriending Yajnavalkya, one of the outstanding thinkers of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, and presiding over philosophical councils. We find king Ajatasatru of Kasi silencing the brahmin priest Balaki in philosophical debates and making him his pupil, and in the Chandogya Upanishad a number of learned brahmins approaching king Asvapati Kaikeya and becoming his disciples.

It was a period when the idea of monotheism began to replace the polytheistic concepts of the early Aryans. Monotheism or belief in a single God made its appearance along with the rise of the territorial state under a single king. The sense of spiritual unity and the idea of unity in diversity during the Upanishadic period reflected the trend towards unification of the various tribes into territorial states.

According to Radhakrishnan, the word "Upanishad" is derived from *upa* (near), *ni* (down), and *sad* (to sit). Groups of pupils sat near the teacher to learn from him the truth of the world. The philosophy of the Upanishads is also called Vedanta, meaning the end and consummation of the Vedas. They mainly deal with the problem of the *jnana* or knowledge.

It is believed that more than 200 Upanishads exist, although the traditional number is 108. Of these, however, only thirteen—Isa, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Aitreya, Taittiriya, Prasna, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, Mandukya, Kausitaki, Maitri and Svetasvatara—

are of pholosophical significance. A number of later philosophies were based primarly on these Upanishads.

The Upanishads were not all written and compiled in the same period. In some cases, different chapters of the same Upanishads represented the ideas of different thinkers. We, therefore, often find varying and sometimes contradictory ideas in them which cannot be reconciled into one logical, coherent and integrated system of philosophy.

Some writers have expressed the view that the Upanishads were opposed to rituals and that with the emergence of the Upanishads the era of the Brahmanas and yajnas came to an end. But there is nothing in the Upanishads to warrant this theory. On the contrary, we find philosopher-kings like Janaka employing priests to perform Vedic yajnas. There are many instances of Upanishadic philosophers emphasising the necessity of performing yajnas for attaining emancipation and immortality. Mundaka Upanishad says, for example:

> "By contemplative power Brahman expands. From that food is produced. From food life, (thence) mind, (thence) the real (the five elements), (thence) the worlds, (thence) the rituals, in the rituals immortality."[1] Again:
> "He whose *agnihotra* sacrifice is not followed by the sacrifice of the new moon and of the full moon, by the four months' sacrifice, by the ritual (performed in the harvest season) is without guests, without oblations, without the ceremony to all the gods or gives offerings contrary to rule (such conduct), destroys his worlds till the seventh."[2]

It is true that the knowledge of rituals and sacrifices was considered by many Upanishadic thinkers to be inferior to philosphical speculataions, especially as they became more and more profound. Mundaka speaks about two kinds of knowledge: the lower and the higher. The lower knowledge was that of the Vedas and also of the ceremonials, while the higher was that of Brahman, the undecaying all-pervading reality.[3] But it cannot be denied that Vedic rituals

[1] *Mundaka Upanishad*, I. 1.8.
[2] *Mundaka Upanishad*, I. 2.3.
[3] *Ibid.*, I. 1.4-5.

continued as an inalienable part of Brahminism even after the development of speculative thought.

One fact, however, stands out. These philosophers were genuine seekers of truth, unfettered by existing dogmas or superstitions. Sitting under the umbrella of reason, they pondered deeply over the problems of life and the universe that confronted man. They cogitated on man in relation to his environment, on the world, its origin and its mysterious phenomena, on the world beyond. With an intellectual daring, incredible for such an age, they tried to get at the roots of existence, leaving no questions unasked. Throughout the Upanishads one sees the imprint of their remarkable intellectual vision, their spirit of enquiry and intense desire to grasp the meaning of life and its ultimate goal.

In its very first stanza, the Kena Upanishad asks:

"By whom willed and directed does the mind light on its objects? By whom commanded does life the first move? At whose will do (people) utter this speech? And what god is it that prompts the eye and the ear?"[4]

The Svetasvatara Upanishad begins with a similar question:

"... Whence are we born? By what do we live? And on what are we established?... At whose command do we abide here, whether in pain or in pleasure?"[5]

Elsewhere:

"Why does not the mind keep still? Why is the human mind restless? Why do the waters flow in without respite even for a moment?"[6]

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad poses the question: When a person fell asleep where was his intelligence and whence did it come back?[7]

The problems were not, however, answered in the same manner by all the Upanishads. Different philosophers gave different answers. While some held that Being arose out of non-Being, others gave just the opposite answer. Some of the philosophic

[4]Rahdakrishnan: *The Principal Upanishads*, p. 581.
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 709.
[6]*Ibid.*, p. 769.
[7]*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II, I. 16.

concepts were dualistic while certain others were monistic. The view that a divine force existed beyond the perceptible universe was upheld by some, while others denied the possibility of any such external supernatural force existing. Some contended that a living soul existed independent of the body which ceased to exist when the bodily functions came to an end. Other philosophers held material forces dependent on spiritual or metaphysical forces. This view was rejected by certain others who thought that spiritual powers depended on material forces. In this manner, philosophers came to be divided generally into two camps depending on their concepts regarding the universe, human life and the relations between these. To the first category belonged the spiritualists (metaphysicians or idealists) and to the second, the materialists. In the Upanishads both these trends can be observed, although on balance, idealist or metaphysical thought predominates.

The world was seen as a sequence of events, an endless chain of cause and effect. But was there an original cause? If so, what was the first cause? Some philosophers stressed the need of an original cause, the first cause, which was nothing but Brahman. They took Brahman as the self-determining cause, the cause of all other causes. But there were other philosophers who ridiculed this idea and denied Brahman as the first cause. The Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads, for example, contain passages which assert that ether (akasa), fire, and air are eternal, without an origin.

The Chandogya Upanishad alludes to Virochana, a representative of the asuras, who believed in the doctrine that the self or atman was identical with the body. The Svetasvatara Upanishad refers to the doctrine which regarded material elements (Bhautani) as the ultimate principle. Similarly, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has this passage:

"In the beginning the universe was just water. That water produced the true (or the real); Brahman is the true. Brahman produced Prajapati, and Prajapati produced the gods. These gods meditated on the real."[8] The Chandogya Upanishad says:

"In the beginning, my dear, this being was alone; one only,

[8] *Bihadaranyaka Upanishad*, V. 5.1.

without a second. Some people say, in the beginning this was non-being alone, the One only, without a second. From that non-being being was produced. But how, indeed my dear, could it be thus? said he, how could being be produced from non-being? On the contrary, my dear, this was being alone, one only, without a second. It thought: May I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth fire. That fire thought, may I be many, may I grow forth. It sent forth water. . . ."[9]

The Taittiriya Upanishad explains:

"From this Self, verily, ether arose; from ether air; from air fire; from fire water; from water the earth; from the earth herbs; from herbs food; from food the person."[10]

The Chandogya Upanishad in one stanza, considers space to be the origin, support and end of all:

"What is the goal of this world?" He replied: "Space (akasa) for all these creatures are produced from space. They return back into space. For space is greater then these. Space is the final goal."[11]

There are other passages which trace the ultimate ground of the world to breath, water, food, etc. According to one passage in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, in the beginning there was nothing. Only Death prevailed:

"There was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning. By death indeed was this covered, or by hunger, for hunger is death. He created mind, thinking. let me have a self..."[12]

The Prana Upanishad offers a different solution to the mystery of creation:

"Matter is verily all this, whatever is formed and formless; therefore whatever is formed is matter."[13] In the Subala Upanishad, we find:

[9] *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI.2.1-3.
[10] *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II. 1.1.
[11] *Chandogya Upanishad*, I. 9.1.
[12] *Brihadaranyaka Upnishad*, I. 2.2.
[13] *Prana Upanishad*, I.7.

"What was there, then? To him (Subala) he (Brahma) said: "It was not existent, nor non-existent. From that emerged darkness, from darkness the subtle elements, from the subtle elements ether, from ether air, from air fire, from fire water, from water earth. . . ."[14]

Thus it is evident that different theories or conjectures were put forward by different philosophers. It is also evident that there did exist a few who did not see creation as an act of Brahman. In their view, from all-pervading death and nothingness arose the universe. In other words, non-being led to being. From death, the non-presence of life, life arose. God or a supreme creator had no role in such a view, because non-existence, non-being, was the primal condition. On the other hand, there were thinkers who considered that matter was the basis and the original cause of the universe.

Yet, it must be noted that these manifestations of materialistic thinking are very rare in the Upanishads, and that too expressed in a vague, nebulous way. The philosophers—most of them, if not all — who set out to unravel the secrets of the universe and to discover the prime cause of creation, finally returned to idealism. They came up against the dead walls of a deep mystery, and could not discover the root cause. The Svetasvatara Upanishad reveals this confusion very clearly:

"Time, inherent nature, necessity, chance, the elements, the womb or the person, (should they) be considered as the cause? It cannot be a combination of these because of the existence of the soul. Even the soul is powerless in respect of the cause of pleasure and pain."[15]

As a result of the confusion, these ancient philosophers turned their faces away from all materialistic explanations. True, some of them analysed the component elements of the world—fire, water, ether, earth and air—the basic elements as they were called. But was the universe only the sum total of its different physical parts? Many Upanishadic seers thought there must be something more than

[14] *Subala Upanishad*, I. 1.

[15] *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 1.2. *The Principal Upanishads*, p. 709.

physical elements, just as there was something more in the human being than the physical parts of the body. That something was the prana or life-breath. Some thinkers thought that this life-breath was nothing but air or wind which animated the body. Breath and wind were regarded as the forces of life. The life-breath in man was called atman or soul and that in the universe, Brahman. Breath or its cosmic equivalent, wind, was supposed to be the vehicle of universal life. But in course of time both atman and Brahman changed into abstract principles. Atman connoted a particular life-force which was independent of the physical body and Brahman an abstract transcendental force. Gradually, atman and Brahman came to be identified with each other.

In ordinary conversation the words "I", "mine", etc. are often used. What does "I" represent? Does it denote the hand? Obviously not, for even if I lose my hand, "I" remains. The limbs or organs cannot be the "I". Neither can the whole body be, for even after physical death "I" remains. This "I" is the truth that survives. This is the soul: such was the reasoning of the ancients.

The rishis tried to understand the true meaning of the atman by analysing the changes in the conditions of man in his wakeful and sleeping states. They concluded that the four possible states of existence for human beings were: the active conscious or wide-awake state, the dreamy state, the deep sleep state and the transcendental, blissful state of consciousness (turiya).

In the first state of active existence, all the organs—sensory and non-sensory—and the mind, all function. In the dreamy state, only the mind functions, the organs of bodily perception remaining idle. In deep slumber, even the faculties of the mind do not function and the sleeper is free from dreams. In the state of turiya the functions of the body and mind are completely stopped, only the essence of the life-force remains. This is thus the natural state of the soul.

The Upanishadic seers thought that in order to grasp the ultimate truth the nature of the soul had to be understood. But what was the soul?

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Janaka asks Yajnavalkya:

"When the sun has set, and moon has set, and the fire has gone out, and speech has stopped, what light does a man have here?"

The answer is:

"The atman, indeed, is his light, for with the atman, indeed, as the light, one sits, moves about, does one's work, and returns."[16]

But in the same Upanishad Yajnavalkya explained to his wife, Maitreyi, that the soul arose out of material elements and at the death of the human being, returned to them.

"As a lump of salt thrown in water becomes dissolved in water and there would not be any of it to seize forth as it were but wherever one may take it is salty indeed, so, verily, this great being, infinite, limitless, consists of nothing but a mass of intelligence (knowledge). Arising from out of these elements it vanishes when they vanish. When it has departed there is no more consciousness."[17]

Maitreyi was bewildered by this explanation and confessed that she did not understand it at all. Yajnavalkya replied simply: "I do not say anything bewildering. This self, verily, is imperishable and of indestructible nature."[18]

Another passage in the same Upanishad identified atman with prana or vital breath: "As a spider moves along the thread, as small sparks come forth from the fire, even so from this self come forth all breaths, all worlds, all divinities, all beings. Its secret meaning is the truth of truth. Vital breaths are the truth and their truth is it (self)."[19]

One thinker points out that as fire takes different shapes depending upon the nature of the object it burns, so also the one atman within all beings becomes varied according to whatever it enters and also exists outside them all!

Some passages have identified the atman with the Brahman. Know one, and you know the other. "With what shall we identify the one thing by knowing which all is known?" The answer is clear: "With the atman."

[16] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 3.6.
[17] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II. 4.12.
[18] *Ibid.*, IV. 5. 14. [19] *Ibid.*

A brahmin scholar asked Yajnavalkya: "Explain to me the Brahman that is immediately present and directly perceived, who is the self in all things?" Yajnavalkya replied: "This is your self. That is within all things."

In the Chandogya Upanishad, Uddalaka tells his son Svetaketu: "That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its self. That is the true, that is the self. That art thou, Svetaketu."[20]

Whoever therefore knew his own atman, knew the atman of the universe, Brahman, too. Thus the atman was supposed to be the essence of all internal reality while Brahman was described as the transcendent unity of the world. In this sense, the one was not different from the other.

Hence the Taittiriya Upanishad's assertion: "He who considers Brahman to be non-existent questions his own existence."[21]

The word Brahman signified different things to different thinkers and in different periods. Originally it was a ritualistic notion and connoted holy knowledge or holy utterance which was supposed to have magic powers. The hymns and incantations were holy and therefore the word Brahman was applied to the Vedas. The word also began to denote religious rituals on which depended even the fate of gods. With the development of speculative thought it came to be regarded as the mystic power inherent in the holy word or the religious ritual and then gradually it became the supreme cosmic principle guiding and controlling the universe. This principle was not identified with God, the creator, for according to the Upanishadic philosophers the universe came into being long before the emergence of gods. Even after God came into the realm of thought he was considered lower than Brahman. In the Upanishads, the term Brahman is used in the neuter. 'It' was greater than 'He.'

The Taittiriya Upanishad describes and elaborates the processes of arriving at an understanding of Brahman. Bhrigu, son of Varuna, does penance to realise the truth about Brahman, and learns that matter is Brahman, life is Brahman, and so on. This elaborate delineation of human thought proceeding step by step towards comprehension is a remarkable piece of literature which reveals the

[20] *Chandogya Upanishad.*

[21] *Taittriya Upanishad.*

keen analytical mind which the early philosophers brought to bear upon the subjects of their investigation. Matter, life, mind, intelligence, bliss—all are analysed in relation to Brahman. Food is important. Do not despise food; from food arises life, from life mind, from mind intelligence, and from intelligence bliss. This is the progress from simple living to the realisation of supreme bliss and finally Brahman is described as supreme bliss.

Some passages in the Upanishads assert that Brahman is man himself and that there is nothing superior to man. In the Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣhad, for example, we find the following regarding Brahman's relation to the self :

> "Whoever knows this, "I am Brahman" becomes this all. Even the gods cannot prevent his becoming thus, for he becomes their self. So whoever worships another divinity (than himself) thinking that he is one and Brahman another, he knows not. He is like an animal to the gods. As many animals serve a man, so does each man serve the gods. Even if one animal is taken away, it causes displeasure. What should one say of many animals? Therefore, it is not pleasing to those gods that men should know this."[22]

In short, this particular piece puts forward the idea that Brahman is nothing but the human being . The worship of gods is compared to the worship of man by animals. Radhakrishnan in his commentary on this passage wrote:

> "The gods are not pleased that men should know the ultimate truth, for then they would know the subordinate place the gods hold and give up making them offerings."[23]

Thus according to the idealist philosophers the ultimate truth was that there was no difference between the atman and Brahman. The soul that dwelt in man and the life-force that existed throughout the universe, both were the same—Brahman. Brahman was everywhere; everything was full of Brahman. "Verily, this whole world is Brahman, from which he comes forth, without which he will

[22] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.*

[23] Radhakrishnan: The Principal Upanishads, pp. 168-69.

be dissolved and in which he breathes."[24] The apparent duality of the soul and the universal spirit was the result of ignorance. Get rid of this ignorance and you will realise "Thou art That" and "I am Brahman."

The universe presented a picture of bewildering diversity. But there was a unity within this diversity, in all the myriad works of nature. According to the materialist view, that unity, the real unity of the universe, consists in its materiality. The early materialists of India considered all phenomena as arising from a single material stuff underlying the entire universe.

The idealist philosophers, however, saw the unity of the world in its being a product of consciousness, a product of Brahman. To them, unity in diversity meant that the diverse phenomena and the processes of nature were the manifestations of Brahman, the Supreme Spirit.

Perhaps, to the ancient philosophers—at least to some of them—Brahman meant the entirety of all elements out of which all things originated. The conception of Brahman as pure consciousness must have been a later development.

The Mundaka Upanishad says:

> "Brahman verily is the immortal. In front is Brahman ; behind is Brahman ; to the right and to the left. It spreads forth below and above. Brahman indeed is this universe."[25]

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad speaks about two forms of Brahman—the formed Brahman and the formless Brahman. Whatever is different from air and atmosphere is classified as the formed Brahman, which is mortal, unmoving and actual, while air and amosphere are considered to be formless Brahman—immortal, moving and true.[26] Thus Brahman is not something above and beyond the universe. It is the universe itself.

The whole world, with all its organic and inorganic matter, with all its things and thoughts, is thus Brahman. This does not necessarily imply that a particular God created all this. The Upanishadic

[24] *Chandogya Upanishad*, III. 14.1.
[25] *Mundaka Upanishad*, II. 2.12.
[26] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II. 3.1-3.

philosophers recognised the reality and the material nature of the world and explained the development of the world as a process of transformation from one state to another—from ether to fire, from water to food, etc. They put forward a whole series of conjectures on the origin of the world linking up different processes on the basis of causes and effects interacting on each other.

In this scheme of creation visualised by many of the Upanishads, there was only a nameless "Void" in the beginning—"that which is ungraspable, without family or caste, without sight or learning, without hands or feet, eternal, omnipresent, exceedingly subtle, that is undecaying."[27] And from this state, by a process of cause and effect, all the living and lifeless objects came into being, one after another.

Many of the Upanishads are steeped in idealism, yet we find in them a solid, healthy recognition of the realities of the material world. We find passages repeatedly emphasizing the importance of human activities. Above all, the Upanishads recognised that the world was subject to continuous change and transformation.

The Upanishadic philosophers evinced a deep attachment to life and an abiding faith in the potentialities of human activity. They sought to know the truth underlying the universe not merely as an abstract speculation but as a means to control the world, for he who knew Brahman was supposed to realise supreme happiness, to conquer sorrow, disease, old age and death.

These philosophers wanted to break through the limitations of their environment. They strove towards a fulness of life in a more comprehensible, happier world. Their teachings reflected the urge of man towards wholeness, to become something more than "I" by merging his transient individuality in the essence of collective humanity, in the universe itself. This craving for fulness and fulfilment is beautifully expressed in the following passage:

"From untruth lead me to truth !
From darkness lead me to light !
From death lead me to immortality !"

[27] *Mundaka Upanishad.*

CHAPTER FIVE

CHATHUR-VARNYA AND BRAHMINISM

THE pre-Aryan inhabitants of India had already built up a wide-spread agricultural economy when the Aryans invaded their land. The Aryan tribes, at the time of their advent into India, were mainly a pastoral people. But with the passing of time many changes occurred in their way of life. With the discovery of new instruments and implements, the mode of production underwent changes. The nomadic pastoral tribes of Aryans began to settle in the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains. They learned to till the land and to cultivate grains. Agriculture thus became their mainstay.

The Vedas, epigraphical records, idols and statues, literary treatises and legal codes of the Vedic Age throw much light on the way of life of the early Aryans, their social relations and ethics, their attitude to labour, and family ties. They indicate that in the earliest periods the Aryans were organised in ganas or tribes. Originally, membership of the gana was determined not by territorial bonds but by kinship or blood relationship. All members of the gana were believed to have descended from the same ancestor and organised in a communal type of life. Cows, goats and other livestock were common property. Land was commonly cultivated under common ownership. There were common pastures and common sheds for cattle. In the absence of class divisions, all adult members, women as well as men, enjoyed equal rights. All military, social, economic and religious functions of society were centred round associations and councils known as Sabhas, Vidatas, Samitis and so on.

Efficient, strong individuals used to be elected as leaders of the tribes to direct the system of production and distribution. They were called Ganapati, Vishapati, Rajan and so on. But there were no kings or landlords. All members of society were equal.

A study of Indian primitive societies, which are still surviving in certain tribal areas, makes it abundantly clear that neither class divisions nor the institution of the state existed in the earliest

stage of Indian society. This is corroborated by literary evidence also. For example, there are passages in the Mahabharata which explicitly state that in the early stage, Indian society knew neither the ruler nor the ruled, neither the oppressor nor the oppressed. Bhishma in the Santiparva describes the state of affairs as follows : "At that time, i.e. in the krita yuga, there was no state, no king, no punishment, no punisher. All men used to protect one another by Dharma."[1]

The growth of productive forces and increase in wealth necessitated the division of labour within the community. Each department of social activity required separate leadership. And so, competent leaders were elected for each sphere of activity. The Kshatriya who provided leadership in battles, and the Brahmin priest whose task it was to calculate and determine the proper time for agricultural operations and to perform religious rites meant to protect men from the wrath of nature and the gods—these two emerged as the leaders of society. There were other categories of people also, engaged in diferent sectors of productive activity such as agriculture and handicrafts. The division of labour, in its turn, led to specialisation. And this meant further increase in productivity and in the aggregate social wealth. The surplus left after satisfying the immediate needs of consumption began to be exchanged for other products. A kind of barter trade developed.

The division of labour, specialisation and exchange, however, led to the break-up of the social system based on common production and common ownership. Instruments of production began to be appropriated by the more assertive and stronger elements of society as their personal property. Wealth and power drifted into the hands of the elected leaders and priests. They in turn began to exploit the labour of others, and to accumulate more wealth. The institution of private property and rise of the "haves" and "have-nots" thus began. The "have-nots" had to submit to the "haves." These material conditions gave rise to the institution of the four varnas. Varna literally means colour. Some sociologists aver that the early Aryans, being colour-conscious, did not want to mix their blood with

[1]*Na vai rajyam na rajasinna cha dando na dandinah dharmenaiva prajah sarva rakshantisma parasparam.*

the original inhabitants and so divided the society first on the basis of colour which later took on functional attributes. There would have been some justification for this argument if there were only two varnas—the Aryans and the non-Aryans. But we find that the Aryans themselves were divided into varnas. Ancient Indian society was not divided into slaves and slave-owners as in Greece and Rome, but rather into four classes known as varnas—brahmin, kshatriya, vaisya and sudra. Chathur-varnya or the fourfold division of society was the specific form of Indian slavery.

The varna system arose in the later phase of the primitive gana system of society. Under the gana system the chieftains (kings) and priests were elected. In course of time these positions became a matter of hereditary right. The process of this change covered a long period. It is significant that in the earlier mandals of the Rig Veda there is no mention of the division of society into varnas. The origin of the institution of varnas is traced to one of the hymns known as the Purusha Sukta towards the end of the Rig Veda, i.e. in the tenth book. This sukta mentions the division of society into brahmins, kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras on a functional basis. The four varnas mentioned in the Purusha Sukta represented a division of labour among what came to be regarded as the four natural components of social life.

The early varnas only signified specialisation, division of labour and not class divisions. Chathur-varnya came to connote class divisions only at a later stage of social development characterised by a further increase in productive forces and the consequent changes in the economic structure. The emergence of classes, following the accumulation of wealth and property in the hands of a small section of people, transformed these varnas into separate classes. Under such conditions the varna system came to signify slavery. This is the reason why we find references to social conflicts, class struggles, conflicts between the rich and the poor and between the exploiters and the exploited, only in the later literature of ancient India like the Manu Smriti, Naradeeya Smriti and Kautilya's Arthasastra and not in the earliest Vedic literature.

It has been suggested that the fourfold division of society in

ancient Iran, corresponding to the Indian Chathur-varnya, must have been known to the early Aryan settlers in India, and that they might also have adopted likewise a fourfold division of society. Later on, it would seem, various tribes of the dasas or dasyus or asuras were taken into the Aryan fold and they were given an inferior status. The new entrants into the fold were treated as helots or slaves and were called sudras. Though there is a good deal of plausibility in this interpretation, and probably a grain of truth, it misses the most salient fact of economic change and subsequent social evolution. It is difficult to believe that the Aryans in India adopted the fourfold division of Iranian society just because they found it convenient. All the available evidence tends to show that this system appeared in India only at a certain stage of social development.

Each varna had its own specific duties and responsibilities. This demarcation of rights and duties governed the relations between the classes and gave stability to the social structure as a whole. The brahmins occupied a highly respected and important position. They were the custodians of social customs and rituals. The study and teaching of the Vedas, the performance of religious ceremonies and rites, the conduct of the yajnas (sacrificial rituals), the receiving of gifts and offerings, such were the tasks assigned to brahmins. They were looked upon as equals of the gods themselves; in fact as gods living on earth (Bhusuras). Their privileges were considered to be so sacrosanct that in course of time they became free to exploit the labour of others, to revel in luxury and to enrich themselves—all in the name of gods! The kshatriyas were ordained to look after and protect the people, to learn the Vedas and receive gifts. Trade, cattle-breeding and agriculture were the tasks of vaisyas. Menial service of these three varnas—without ill will, or discontent—was the task allotted to the sudras.[2]

The sudras thus constituted the lowest of the varnas. The brahmins, who enjoyed special privileges, possessing all material wealth and enjoying every possible luxury, were not supposed

[2] *Manu Smriti*, I, 88-91.

even to touch a sudra, lest they should pollute themselves. The sudra was not permitted to worship the Vedic gods or study the holy scriptures. He was almost kept outside the pale of religion. He could claim no right over the common properties of the community. The sudras were the "private property" of the wealthy classes, just like cattle and household utensils.

Within the varna, the individual's life was divided into four broadly distinguishable stages or ashramas. Boyhood was the time for study and preparation for an earthly life. The student was required to observe absolute abstinence or brahmacharya in this period. The next stage was that of married life (*grihastha* or domestic life). It was the most active period in life, the time for worldly enjoyments and social and political activities. The third stage was *vanaprastha* or the stage of retirement from the stresses and strains of life for serene contemplation. The last stage was *sanyasa* or renunciation when the individual entrusted his properties to his children and then gave up earthly duties, becoming an ascetic.

The varnashrama system demanded strict ethical discipline and observance of svadharma (or class duties) from every member of society. Needless to say, the sudras were exempted from these ashramas. Their svadharma was to work hard and serve the master to the end.

The four varnas did not cover all the divisions among the population of ancient India. There were people who did not belong to any of the varnas. Below the lowly sudras were the "low tribes" and "low trades"—*hina-jatiya* and *hina-sippani*. Among the first we are told of workers in rushes, bird-catchers, and cart-makers—aboriginal tribesmen, who were hereditary craftsmen. Among the latter—mat-makers, barbers, potters, weavers, and leather-workers.[3] These people too were exploited by the brahmins and other richer sections of society.

With the emergence of class divisions and economic inequalities, consanguinity or the bond of kinship assumed lesser importance as a factor of unity. Territorial factors played a greater role now,

[3]Rhys Davids: *Buddhist India*, pp. 33-44.

and new units of people living within well-defined areas began to emerge. The gentile organisation of the gana was gradually undermined. Tribal councils gave way to territorial authorities. The tribal chieftains who wielded supremacy within the gana turned into kings of territories. The customary election of successors in the gana changed into hereditary royalty and hereditary nobility. The mutual cooperation and collective labour of the gana gave way to the *danda* (enforcement authority) of the State. The rashtra or rajyam, composed of many ganas, was ruled by the king. Below the king were the nobles, owners of wealth and masters of slaves, and also the brahmins, hereditary priests. These two categories of people managed the economic, social and political affairs of society.

Thus, between the tenth and seventh centuries B.C., a number of small states came into being in various parts of India. Many of them figure in the Mahabharata. Buddhist texts mention sixteen, viz. Anga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Cheti, Vamsa, Kuru, Panchala, Maccha, Surasena, Assakha, Avanti, Gandhara and Kamboja. This list, however, is not exhaustive; for other kingdoms too had been formed during the same period. The Andhras, the Pandyas, the Cholas, and the Cheras in South India, and others are examples. Rhys Davids remarks: "It is interesting to notice that the names are not of countries, but of peoples, as we might say Italians or Turks. This shows that the main idea in the minds of those who drew up or used this old list was still tribal and not geographical."[4] This also shows that between the tenth and seventh centuries B.C. kingdoms based on slavery were just arising from the womb of the primitive tribal society. It was in the process of this transformation that the later Vedic literature like the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanishads came into existence. It may also be mentioned that these ancient kingdoms had not come into being simultaneously. The people of some parts of the country remained tribal while others rose to statehood. By the seventh century B.C. some kingdoms had become powerful. The emergence of these states was an uneven development.

A special feature of Indian slavery was the fact that unlike in

[4]Rhys Davids: *Buddhist India*, p. 14.

ancient Greece or Rome, the elements of primitive communism were not completely extinct. The old natural economy of tribal society continued to exist even within the new framework of the varna structure.

When the tribe broke into branches in the early stages of slavery, there appeared "a real necessity for breaking up the common economy into more isolated groups" (Marx) and the tribal property was divided into large individual joint-family property. The family community was a product of the disintegration of the tribal community caused by the development of material production. Kovalevsky, a Russian sociologist of the nineteenth century, considered it as an intermediate stage between the tribal and village communities.

The system of village communities composed of groups of small as well as big joint families, which coexisted with the varna structure of society, was another characteristic of the Indian slave-owning system. When class divisions arose and kings became powerful, the villages were obliged to pay a fixed share of the produce to them. This share, which was in the form of a tribute, was between one-fourth and one-sixth, or even less, in different periods. The king was supposed to be the owner of all lands, but in reality he had a right only to the tribute. Of course, in the later stage of slavery, especially under the Mauryas, many large farms were owned by the king himself. Kautilya recommended the appointment of *Seethadhyakshas* who were to get the state farms tilled and sown by slaves or labourers. The new territories conquered by war automatically became the property of the king. He distributed a part of such lands to brahmins and others who served the state.

Sometimes the ancient village community owned not only land but also the slaves collectively. The state too employed slaves. They were engaged in various works like irrigation, construction of buildings, roads, etc. as for example in the empire of Asoka, and under the Cholas in the South. Besides the slaves, there were different types of artisans also who worked for the community as a whole. The slaves of course were owned not only by the village community as a whole but also by well-to-do individuals.

The varna system of slavery developed in India in a complicated

and uneven manner. As already mentioned, the uneven development of society from primitive communism to slavery in one vast subcontinent resulted in the existence of old tribal societies side by side with the new slave-owning kingdoms. There were not only Indian tribes but various foreign tribes and frontier clans like the Greeks, Scythians, Persians and the Chinese. Manu has enumerated various independent tribes such as Paundrakas, Dravidas, Kambojas, Javanas, Sakas, Prabhavas, Cinas, Kiratas, and Khasas (X.43-45). In some areas slavery was well developed when in the adjacent areas it was just in its initial stages. Some territories were well-established kingdoms while others were still under tribal chieftains or were in the stage of transition from gana to rajyam. Under such circumstances, the Smritis and Sastras could not have had universal validity. The cruel and inhuman treatment of slaves recommended by the early law-givers was perhaps legal only in areas where the supremacy of brahmins was well established. There were at the same time other areas where the sudras enjoyed relatively greater freedom and where social relations were not governed by the dictates of Manu or Narada, and also areas where the old tribal system with its collective life and democratic councils prevailed. It may also be mentioned that in some regions, especially in the South, slavery did not emerge under the leadership of the brahmins and the influence of Brahminism, therefore, was negligible. In such areas the survivals of primitive communism and village community remained stronger.

Under such circumstances, the system of production on big farms owned by rich individuals commanding hundreds and thousands of slaves, such as the *latifundia* of ancient Greece and Rome, did not become the dominant feature in India. The distinctive feature of Indian slavery was that, by and large, the slaves worked as domestic servants of rich families. Female slaves had to do the domestic chores like cleaning houses, drawing water and grinding corn, while the more arduous jobs such as the production of household things and cultivation on farms had to be attended to by the male slaves.

This, however, does not mean that large-scale farms worked by slaves did not exist in India. The Jataka tales mention large estates of 1,000 *Krishas* and wealthy people owning 40 to 80 crores of

money (pana). But they were rather exceptional and did not dominate the economy as in ancient Greece and Rome.

As the slave economy developed and the social system based on varnashrama began to be consolidated, rivalry and conflicts broke out among the slave-owners. Incessant wars convulsed the small states. In the struggle for supremacy, towards the middle of the sixth century B.C., the kingdom of Magadha under Bimbisara (543-491 B.C.) of the Saisunga dynasty came out victorious. Magadha became the most powerful kingdom in North India, with its capital at Pataliputra (modern Patna) in Bihar. By the middle of the fourth century B.C., Magadha had extended its domain almost throughout the whole of northern and central India. About this time Mahapadma Nanda occupied the throne and established the Nanda dynasty.

Also, as early as the sixth century B.C. India began to have contacts with Central Asia and Iran. At the beginning of the sixth century B.C., Darius I of Persia (Iran) occupied the territories on the banks of the Indus. But Persian rule did not last long. The Macedonians of Greece under Alexander invaded India and in 326 B.C. defeated the Persians and the local chiefs who acknowledged the authority of the King of Persia.

Before Alexander retreated, he divided his Indian territories among his three generals—Indian and foreign. But before long, revolts broke out in the area occupied by the Greek garrisons. It was about this time that a chieftain named Chandragupta Maurya united the various tribes under his leadership, exterminated the Greek garrisons, overthrew the Nanda ruler and ascended the throne of Pataliputra, as the first king of the Mauryan dynasty. Under Asoka, the third ruler of the dynasty, the whole of India except the extreme South was included in the Mauryan Empire. This period of the Mauryan dynasty (324-187 B.C.) was the golden age of slavery in India.

The varna system of slavery must have continued in India for about a thousand years. It is only natural that the economic, social and political changes that occurred during this long period should have affected and modified this system, although the basic contradiction between the productive forces and the productive

relations remained. The legal codes of Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada and Briaspathi and Kautilya's Arthasastra, and the Buddhist, Jaina and other extant literature of the period help us to understand not only the special features of Indian slavery but also the changes that it underwent in centuries of development. All these works take for granted the division of society into varnas, and some of them even attribute divine sanction to it. The undue privileges, the despotism and parasitism of the dominant classes were sought to be justified by the nature of the special duties assigned to them and by their birth in the higher varnas. It was a period of ruthless exploitation and cruel treatment of slaves.

It is probable that in the early stages only non-Aryans like dasas or dasyus were turned into slaves. The slogan was: "Aryans never shall be slaves." But when differences grew sharper, even a section of the Aryans became slaves. Under the Mauryas, sale of persons into slavery or mortgaging them for a certain period became very common. Manu Smriti (the legal code of Manu) which was first codified towards the end of the first millennium B.C., probably during the epoch of brahmin revivalism under Pushyamitra Sunga in the second century B.C., and which was finally edited with many additions and subtractions in the beginning of the Christian era, made a distinction between the bought (krita) slave from the unbought (akrita) slave. The former could be bought and sold as chattel. Whether bought or unbought, the sudra had to render his services (dasyan); for he had been created to serve the brahmin! Service was the sudra's ordained duty (nisargaja dharma). And not only Aryan sudras, but even Aryan brahmins were, in times of difficulty, sold or mortgaged.

Manu refers to seven types of slaves: one made captive in warfare (dhvajaahrita), one accepting slavery for subsistence (bhaktadasa), one born in the master's household (grihaja), one purchased (krita), one received by gift (datrima), one inherited from ancestors (paitrika), and one enslaved by way of punishment (dandadasa).[5] But Narada, who is posterior to Manu, mentions fifteen different types: born in house (of the master), bought,

[5] *Manu*, VIII.

received (as present), received as heritage, supported at a time of general famine, pawned by one's lawful relatives, freed from a heavy debt, prisoner of war, won in gambling, coming with the declaration "I am yours," apostle from asceticism, slave from the period fixed by agreement, one who became a slave for maintenance, enslaved along with a female slave, and one who sold himself.[6] Narada's diversified classification indicates that by his time the pauperisation of the masses had increased to a great extent and that debt slavery had become a more important form of exploitation than under Manu. Unable to pay their debts, the poor, exploited peasants were often obliged to work for the usurer as slaves for a specific period of time. It is true that Manu also permits debt slavery in extreme cases. The debtor is enjoined to repay his debt to his creditor even by labour, if he belongs to the same varna or to a lower varna. But a brahmin could never become a slave. However, Kautilya's Arthasastra which is posterior to Manu Smiriti and Narada Smriti reveals that not only the sudras and vaisyas, but also brahmins could at times of calamity be converted into slaves. Both Narada and Kautilya also describe in detail the norms of behaviour to be observed by slaves and the circumstances under which a slave could be freed.

According to Manu, the brahmin master could legally and rightfully take away any wealth owned by the slave, for the sudra or slave could not possess wealth as his own private property.[7] Sarma quotes the instance of a female slave, who was subjected to corporal punishment for her failure to bring her wages back to her master.[8] Saran mentions another slave girl, Dhanapali, who was severely beaten and hired out to work for others.[9] Narada generally agrees with Manu in this regard.

As in other countries, in India too the rich grew richer by ruthless slave labour. The masters knew no pity, no qualms of conscience, and they often mercilessly beat the slaves, chained them and inflicted inhuman punishments on them. Their only

[6] *Narada*, V. 26.2.
[7] *Manu*, VIII. 417.
[8] R. Sarma: *Sudras in Ancient India*, p. 108.
[9] K. M. Saran: *Labour in Ancient India*, p. 26.

concern was to make the most of their slaves. The following passage from Suyagadam is specially noteworthy: "A man will (occasionally) severely punish even the smallest offence of his domestics, viz. a slave or messenger, or hired servant or vassal, or parasite, e.g. punish him, pull out his hair, beat him, put him in irons, in fetters, in stocks, into prison, screw up in a pair of shackles (his hands and feet) and break them, cut off his hands or feet or ears, or nose or lips or head or face, pierce his feet, tear out his eyes, teeth, tongue, hang him, brush him, whirl him round, impale him, lacerate him, pour acids (in his wounds), belabour him with cutting grass, bind him to a lion's tail, burn him in wood on fire, let him be devoured by crows and vultures, stop his food and drink, keep him a prisoner for life, let him die any of these horrid deaths."[10]

The Dharma Sutras reveal not only discriminations against the lower classes, but also the intense dissatisfaction of the slaves and other exploited sections of the people. There were innumerable cases of escape, but the run-away slaves were punished severely. The slaves did not submit to the ruling classes without protest. They often struck back. This explains the severity of the punishments for offences committed by the slaves against the exploiting classes.

Apart from the struggles between the slaves and their masters, there were rivalries and conflicts within the upper classes also—between the brahmins on one side and the kshatriyas and the vaisyas on the other. There were also, as pointed out above, sanguinary wars among the states for supremacy. It was only natural that these internal contradictions and struggles shook the very foundations of Chathur-varnya.

The changes in the social and economic life of the people were inevitably reflected in their religious beliefs and world outlook. The religion of the Aryans of the early slave society came to be known as Brahminism. It took shape in the first half of the first millennium B.C., i.e. between the tenth and the seventh centuries B.C., and was elaborated step by step in the priestly literature of

[10]Jacobi's translation—quoted by R. Sarma in *Sudras in Ancient India*, p. 108-109.

the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, etc. The Vedangas and the early Dharma Sastras laid the social and cultural bases of the slave-owning society with its territorial divisions and class differences.

But how was it that religious views which arose as the "fantastic reflection in men's minds of the external forces of nature," continued to thrive in one form or another even after the primitive people entered the stage of civilization? How could religion exist side by side with the relative advance of science which led to a progressive knowledge of nature? The answer seems to lie in the fact that religion at a certain stage of development acquires social attributes and becomes the representative of the economic and social forces of history. It was thus that the Aryan gods who were at first simple personifications of the forces of nature assumed social importance and acquired social attributes. This transformation gave some solace and illusory happiness to the people and helped them face the hardships of life. It was at the same time "the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering," as Marx put it: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."[11]

This much-misunderstood definition by Marx stresses two contradictory aspects: religion is at once the true expression of the distressed state of mind and a protest against it. The first one reflects helplessness and a resigned attitude towards oppression, misery and the soulless conditions of society while the second reflects a desire to end oppression and social inequalities. To stress only one aspect of this contradiction is tantamount to distorting Marx's statement.

In India faith in religion has not always been incompatible with social progress. In fact, it often took the form of a protest against oppression and exploitation. Many social and political battles in India were fought under the garb of religious reforms. Religious movements, especially in their initial and not yet institutionalized form, thus played a dynamic and progressive role. As

[11]Marx: *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.*

we will see in these pages, at certain turning points of our history a spiritual attitude to religious teachings developed among the masses an extraordinary creative power that helped to bring about unprecedented social changes.

Brahminism, the religion of the early slave-owning society in ancient India, helped to consolidate the states investing them with divinity. Rituals and sacrifices were conducted for the victory of the kings, and in this priests played a prominent part. Divine sanction was invoked to buttress the coercive powers of the state. The king was proclaimed to be the living embodiment of God's will. Even a child-king had to be implicitly obeyed. The king's holy wrath would utterly destroy the disobedient. Exploitation under the Varnashrama system was also sought to be justified by vesting it with religious authority.

The central teaching of Brahminism was the belief in an impersonal, eternal, all-pervading supreme power—Brahman. But Brahminism was not merely a philosophy. Along with philosophical ideas, it revived and consolidated the primitive animistic beliefs and customs and turned them into religious dogmas.

The animistic conception of the soul as distinct from the body, and the belief that at the death of man his soul would transmigrate to another body went into the making of the theory of Karma. "While the conceptions of Karma and Rebirth," says Radhakrishnan, "are unquestionably the work of the Aryan mind, it need not be denied that the suggestions may have come from the aborigines, who believed that after death their souls lived in animal bodies."[12]

According to certain scholars, Karma originally indicated the biological development of a seed into its fruit. It was a term used to denote physical motion and development and no idea of reward and punishment was associated with it. But in the hands of the brahmin priests the doctrine of Karma became a religious concept and was used to trace man's happiness and sorrow to his past action in this life or in a "previous" life. How is it that some men are happy and some unhappy? It is due to Karma. How is it that then some virtuous men suffer and wicked men prosper?

[12]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 136.

Karma again—Karma of their previous lives! How is it that some are born in the higher varna, and others in the lower? By Karma, of course! The law of Karma worked on its own so that those who performed good deeds prospered and evil-doers suffered—if not in one life, in the next and the next. Karma in short was an inexorable law of good or bad effects, following good or bad actions.

Along with the law of Karma developed the doctrine of the transmigration of soul. The soul was conceived as a distinct entity which would leave the body after death and migrate into some other body. The law of Karma determined the nature of new births, which thus depended on one's own deeds. A man will be reborn in a higher or lower varna in consequence of his actions in this life and the fulfilment of his own dharma. If he does not perform his dharma properly, there is the danger of his rebirth as an animal or even as a lower creature!

Dharma was a religious, ethical concept of social conduct. There was no common dharma for the people in general. Each varna had its swadharma (i.e. its own duties and obligations). The dharma of the sudra was different from that of the brahmin. As defined by the Dharma Sastras, dharma was "the sum total of the distinctive duties of the constituent units of the social systems comprising of four classes (varnas) and the four orders (ashramas)," which were sacred and had to be defended at all costs. Brahmins, in other words, taught the people not to worry about their worldly sufferings but to be devoted to their swadharma. The Bhagavad Gita exhorted: "Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well performed; better is death in the discharge of one's duties; another's duty is fraught with danger."

For all this clever justification of their ascendancy and their exploitation of the labouring classes, it cannot be denied that the brahmin priest-class played a progressive role in the historical sense during a particular stage of social development of the Indian polity. They promoted the growth of productive forces making way for the advance of society to a higher plane. Under Chathur-varnya, the brahmins who were exempted from physical labour got the opportunity and leisure for intellectual and artistic pursuits. It was under such favourable conditions that great men of letters—

epic writers, poets, grammarians, composers of smiritis, vedangas and sutras—came to the fore and enriched Indian culture generally. Brahminism thus brought in its wake a many-sided upsurge not only in philosophy but also in literature and art, medicine, astronomy and other ancient sciences.

Yet, in course of time, the changes in the material conditions of society transformed the once progressive brahmin class into a reactionary one. They were unable to grasp the significance and importance of the new social forces that had emerged as a result of the considerable progress in the mode of production of handicrafts, the growth of trade, and the consequent appearance of powerful new classes in the later period of slavery. They refused to recognise the changes in the economic sphere and clung tenaciously to their old supremacy which they regarded as divinely ordained. They continued to preach what they called eternal truths, and through their rites and ceremonies persisted in exploiting the common people. Thus Brahminism having turned into a fetter on social progress, the fight against it became a historic task that confronted society. And it was soon partially accomplished by the new forces which emerged, with the Darsanas raising the struggle between Idealism and Materialism to a higher plane.

It was a period of widespread discontent on the one hand, and of a great intellectual ferment on the other. A sense of frustation and uncertainty was in the air, which paved the way for bold speculations and revolts against metaphysical dogmatism. Radhakrishnan describes the intellectual climate of India in the 6th century B.C. thus:

> "Discussions were rife about the finiteness or infiniteness, or neither or both, of the world and the self (atma), and the distinction of truth and appearance, the reality of a world beyond, the continuance of the soul after death and the freedom of the will. Some thinkers identified mind and soul, others distinguished them from each other. Some held to the supremacy of God and others to that of man. Some argued that we know nothing about it; others flattered their audiences with mighty hopes and confident assurances. Some were busy building

elaborate metaphysical theories; others were equally busy demolishing them. Many theories independent of the Vedic tradition arose. There were the Nigganthas, or fetter-freed; the Samanas, or the ascetics who did not belong to the Brahmanical order; those who sought peace of soul in the renunciation of the world; those who practised self-mortification, denying themselves nourishment for long periods; those who tried spiritual abstraction; the dialecticians, the controversialists, the materialists and sceptics....It was an age of speculative chaos, full of inconsistent theologies and vague wranglings."[13]

These were the conditions that gave birth to the various systems of Indian Philosophy.

[13]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 352-353.

PART II

MATERIALISM AND IDEALISM IN ANCIENT INDIA

CHAPTER SIX

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DARSANAS

MANY scholars, both Indian and foreign, have tried to equate Indian philosophy with idealism. Some have gone even to the extent of defining philosophy as "the Science of the Self."[1] This, however, is far from the truth. An impartial study will show that the history of Indian philosophy consists of diverse and contradictory trends, both idealist and materialist. And these different schools of philosophy did not appear essentially as the product of "pure thought" of great thinkers. They were rooted in reality, in the actual changes in economy and social structure. The philosophic ideas were only the reflection of these changes in men's minds, so much so that each philosophic system bears the imprint of its time.

But what is philosophy? It is an integrated conception of the world we live in, and of our relations to this world. It explains the origin and the problems of man, nature and the universe, the problems of knowledge, thought, life, art and religion, the problems of the fundamental relation between thinking and being, between matter and mind. Did God create the universe, or has it been in existence eternally? Which is anterior, matter or spirit, being or thinking? Is our thinking capable of cognition of the real world? Can we get a correct reflection of the objective reality in our ideas about it? Does the world exist only in our thinking, or has it an independent existence? It is in accordance with the way in which such questions were answered that idealist and materialist schools of thought differentiated themselves in all countries. The history of philosophy is, therefore, the history of man's efforts to understand the relation between thinking and being. And this understanding is intimately connected with the development of man himself, i.e. with the historical process of the development of social and economic relations, the advances in material production and the struggles of the contending classes.

[1] P. Narayana Rao: *Introduction to Vedanta*, p. 33.

Though the origin of philosophic thought in India may be traced to the early Upanishads and even to the hymns of the Rig Veda, it began to develop into full-fledged systems or Darsanas during the historic period when small slave-owning kingdoms fighting for supemacy were giving way to big slave-owning empires.

As already noted, brahmin ritualism had become an obstacle in economic, political and social development and therefore a struggle against Brahminism became a historical necessity. But without striking at the authority of the Vedas, brahmin priesthood could not be challenged, because the brahmins had assumed pre-eminence by their proficiency in the Vedas and their privileged position in the conduct of Vedic rituals. Manu declared:

> "Since he (the brahmin) possesses the Veda, he is by right the lord (prabhu) of the whole creation."[2]

> Again: "From his high birth alone a brahmin is regarded as divinity even by the gods. His teaching must be accepted by the rest of the world as an infallible authority, for the Veda (Brahma) itself is the cause."[3]

Under such conditions, it was quite natural that many philosophical systems refused to recognise the authority of the Vedas and vehemently opposed the Vedantic conception of the origin of the universe.

Between the seventh and second centuries B.C., out of the many philosophical schools of thought some developed into full-fledged systems. Among them were Lokayata, Samkhya, Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta, Jainism and Buddhism, founded respectively by Brihaspati, Kapila, Gautama, Kanada, Patanjali, Jaimini, Badrayana, Vardhamana, and the Buddha. Some of them were only legendary figures, and very little is known about their personal lives. These great philosophers of ancient India expounded their systems in sutras, short and cryptic aphorisms, which gave in a condensed form the essence of their philosophical doctrines and thus aided the pupils to learn them by heart, and which

[2] *Manu*, 1.93.

subsequently became the subject of various commentaries in different periods of Indian history.

But these sutras were not the starting point of the philosophical schools. They rather marked the conclusion of a long period of speculation, the crystallization of nebulous forms of thought which must have existed hundreds of years before. Their real originators are unknown. The great philosophers like Kanada, Kapila and Gautama only formulated in well-arranged systems the principles already extant and generally accepted.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya in his valuable work on Lokayata nas expressed the strange view that not only Lokayata, but also the Samkhya and Yoga of later times and even the Tantrism of the Middle Ages, emerged from the primitive fertility-magic of tribal people, euphemistically called proto-materialism which rests on the assumption "that the productivity of nature—of mother earth—can be enhanced or induced by the imitation of human reproduction and conversely human fertility is similarly related to natural fertility."[4] He almost equates ritualism with materialim so much so that, according to him, the subsoil of even the Vedic world-view was some kind of proto-materialism, as it was related to ritualism.[5]

It is true that many elements of primitive thought and primitive practice survived in the religions and philosophies of India. But, as we have already seen, totemism and magic with its fertility cult were neither anti-religious nor materialistic. On the contrary, they were primitive forms of religion and spiritualism.

Debiprasad's view that the idealist outlook in India emerged "on the ruins of a primitive proto-matrialism, representing the consciousness of the primitive pre-class society"[6] is equally untenable; for the elements of primitive beliefs and primitive religious practices of the pre-class society survived in Brahminism more than in any other ancient ideology. Brahminism adopted the animistic conception of the soul prevalent among the primitive pre-class people and developed it into an idealist philsosophy of Karma.

[3] *Ibid.*, XI.84.
[4] Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya: *Lokayata*, XX, p. 63.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. XVIII.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. XXIII.

Moksha and Reincarnation of the Soul. The essence of this idealist philosophy was that everything originated from pure consciousness called Atman or Brahman. Brahminism again adopted the primitive forms of worship embodied in totemism and magic, and developed them into an elaborate system of ritualism. Materialism emerged as an authentic system of philosophy in India precisely by fighting these two aspects of idealism, viz: the concept of an eternal soul and the ritualism of the Vedic period. Not only Lokayata, but Samkhya, Vaiseshika and other systems of philosophy also developed in this struggle between idealism and materialism.

The main systems of Indian philosophy are generally divided into two categories—The Astika Darsanas and Nastika Darsanas. According to Patanjali (about 150 B.C.) astika means one who believes "it exists," and nastika one who believes "it does not exist." An astika was regarded as one who believed in the existence of paraloka (the other world), and a nastika as one who did not believe in its existence. But, in course of time, new meanings were attributed to these words. The Astika Darsanas denoted the systems which recognised the authority of the Vedas while the Nastika Darsanas denied Vedic authority. According to this new classification, which has been adopted by many modern writers, the Samkhya, Nyaya, Yoga, Vedanta, Mimamsa and Vaiseshika systems belong to the astika group, while the Lokayata, Madhyamika, Sautrantika, Vaibhashika and Jaina systems are nastika.

The popular idea that nastikavada is atheism is said to be a misconception. The Samkhya, Vaiseshika and Nyaya deny God and trace the origin of the universe not to the idealist principle of Brahman or pure consciousness, but to some materialist principle or other. Yet they are known not as nastika but as astika philosophies, simply because they recognise the Vedas. Lokayata which is firmly based on a materialist creed is called nastika, not for its materialism, but for its non-recognition of the authority of the Vedas. The attitude towards the Vedas is thus the basis of the classification. This, however, does not seem to be a sound approach. For although the Astika Darsanas quote from Vedic texts in order to establish one point or the other, most of them vehemently oppose the main

idealist outlook and the mystic notions contained in the Vedas and Upanishads. The brahmin priests did their utmost to prevent the development of any philosophical view which was inimical to their own narrow interests. Those who opposed the authority of the Vedas and priestly rituals were threatened with dire punishment. Even speaking to them was considered to be a sin. Manu advocated strong legal measures against the vilifiers of the Vedas. Many philosophers succumbed to this pressure, but some fought back. The Lokayatikas were the most consistent critics of Brahminism and Vedic ceremonies and suffered most for their convictions. The Vaiseshikas and the Naiyayikas paid lip service to the authority of the Vedic texts and at the same time continued to propagate their own radical views which went, in fact, against the idealist teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Some claimed that their views were not incompatible with the Srutis, i.e. the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Samkhyas, according to whom Pradhana or unevolved matter comprising its three constituents (the gunas—Satva, Rajas and Tamas) was the cause of the universe, asserted, for example, that their doctrine was strictly in accordance with the Upanishads. They argued with the Vedantins as follows:

> "The Upanishadic texts which according to you (Vedantins) reveal an omnipotent and omniscient Brahman as the cause of the universe can be understood equally well to imply that Pradhana is the cause of the universe. As for omnipotence, Pradhana can also have it well enough in respect of its own modifications; similarly, omniscience also is logical, because, that which you consider to be knowledge is a characteristic of satva, as is proved from the Smriti. Knowledge springs from satva" (Gita XIV.17).[7]

Perhaps the exponents of these philosophies thought that some formal respect for the Vedas was necessary to conciliate the feelings and prejudices of the dominant sections in society. Again, probably it was with this view that they promised everlasting bliss and release from all bondage as the ultimate objective of their systems.

[7]Sankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, 1.1.5.

But they were not quite successful in this respect. In most of the cases, acceptance of the authority of the Vedas was only nominal and the orthodox brahmins openly attacked them and made fun of their doctrines.

Some writers classify Indian philosophy into orthodox and heretical systems. Samkhya, Vaiseshika, Nyaya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta are declared to be orthodox while Lokayata, Buddhism and Jainism are classified under the heretical schools. But to decide what is orthodox and what is heretical, is not so easy. It is interesting to note that the Buddhist and Jaina texts considered themselves as orthodox and the Vedanta as a heretical system of philosophy!

It seems to be better, therefore, to classify Indian philosophy broadly into materialistic and idealistic schools, although this classification also may not be fully satisfactory, for, apart from completely idealistic and completely materialistic systems, there are schools which contain elements of both. Philosophers who regard spirit as primary and assume world-creation in some form or other may be said to belong to the camp of idealism while those who assert the primacy of nature to spirit may be classified as materialists. The history of Indian Philosophy is the history of the struggle between these two schools of thought.

Idealism, as a system of world outlook, arose only when society was divided into classes and intellectual labour was separated from manual labour. "Division of labour," wrote Marx and Engels, "only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards, consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it is *really* conceiving something without conceiving something *real*; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc."[8]

This deos not, however, mean that in class society only idealism existed, nor does it mean that materialism existed only in classless society. Every class-society has produced not only idealist views

[8]Marx and Engels: *German Ideology*, p. 20.

but also materialist views. Considered in the historical perspective, at every step in practical activity men have found it necessary to distinguish between illusion and reality. Many great thinkers have from time to time noticed the inadequacy of idealist speculations and the necessity to recognise objective reality. The aspirations of the people for a better living and the rivalries and struggles of the contending classes were often reflected in their ideology also. The enlightened materialist doctrines helped to promote the progress of society in general, and of medicine, astronomy, mathematics, etc. in particular; while the metaphysical and idealist doctrines often hindered culture and scientific development and were utilised by the reactionary classes to consolidate their regime of exploitation. Thus the different philosophic schools have played an active role in social development. They either helped the acceleration of the process of social changes or retarded it.

The development of productive forces from primitive economy—the growth of agriculture, irrigation, construction, handicrafts, etc.—necessitated some knowledge of mathematics and astronomy and of the physical and chemical properties of material objects. This paved the way for a materialistic outlook on life which by its very nature clashed with the ideology of the priestly class holding fast to the old order of things. This led to the great struggle between the materialist and idealist philosophers of ancient India.

It can be seen that in these early stages of the evolution of Indian thought, materialism was predominant not only among the people, but even among sections of the ruling classes. The first great philosophical schools of India like Lokayata, Samkhya, Nyaya and Vaiseshika were all dominated by materialist thought; and all these systems arose in the course of a bitter struggle against the mystical and idealist world outlook. By the time of the Mauryan emperors in the fourth century B.C. materialist doctrines had begun to wield tremendous influence. Kautilya's Arthasastra refers to the three philosophies—Samkhya, Yoga and Lokayata—and advises kings to study carefully the materialist theories in these systems.

Materialism has thus played a progressive role in Indian history.

It has always sided with social progress and the love of life and humanism. In *The Discovery of India*, Pandit Nehru writes: "In India we find during every period when her civilization bloomed an intense joy in life and nature, a pleasure in the act of living, the development of art and music and literature and song and dancing and painting and the theatre, and even a highly sophisticated enquiry into sex relations. It is inconceivable that a culture or view of life based on otherworldliness or world-worthlessness could have produced all these manifestations of vigorous and varied life. Indeed it should be obvious that any culture that was basically otherworldly could not have carried on for thousands of years."[9]

Nevertheless in certain periods of Indian history, particularly, in times of intense class struggles, wars, famines, floods, or draught, which brought in their wake enormous material losses and suffering, there has been a tendency to escape from real life into the realms of metaphysical thought. And such occasions, no doubt, provided a favourable ground for the growth of idealism. "Perhaps the ideas of renunciation and life-negation are caused by a feeling of frustration due to political and economic factors."[10]

This does not mean that idealist thought in India has always played a reactionary role. It is true that the upper classes of society often tried to use idealist philosophies to maintain their privileged positions. But many progressive thinkers in the various phases of development of Indian society belonged to the camp of idealism. It would, therefore, be wrong to dismiss the idealist schools of thought as a negative factor in Indian civilization. A study like this will be incomplete without understanding their constructive contributions to the evolution of Indian thought.

The early philosophers of India who lived in the period when the slave system had reached its high watermark, with its consequent social malaise, were very much concerned over the problems of human suffering. Why did man suffer? What was the real cause of this suffering, and how could it be eliminated or assuaged?

The various philosophical systems in India aimed at enlightenment which would help man to get rid of the distresses and suffer-

[9] Jawaharlal Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 71.
[10] *Ibid.*,

ings of existence. The world was considered to be a vale of tears, particularly when class contradictions developed and exploitation intensified. That was why the concept of Moksha or liberation became common among almost all philosophical systems of India (with the probable exception of the Charvaka). "Indian philosophy," wrote Hiriyanna, "originated under the pressure of a practical need arising from the presence of moral and physical evil in life. It is the problem of how to remove this evil that troubled the ancient Indian most and Moksha (liberation) in all the systems represents a state in which it is, in one sense or another, taken to have been overcome."[11]

The word "Moksha" or "deliverance" was not always used in a religious or idealist sense. Different philosophers interpreted it differently, suggested different paths to Moksha and upheld different conceptions of matter, soul, God and creation. But our ancient thinkers, both idealists and materialists, came to the conclusion that the problem of man and the universe could be solved, and sufferings and pain could be overcome only by a true knowledge of reality. And thus philosophy meant an earnest enquiry into the nature of reality. A correct apprehension of the reality underlying the world of appearance and incessant changes was regarded as the highest kind of knowledge. The quest for ultimate truth was proclaimed to be the supreme endeavour of humanity. Needless to say, the different systems of Indian philosophy embodied different conceptions of the ultimate reality.

Indian philosophy, which has contributed much to the treasure-house of world-thought, is the theoretical experience accumulated by our people through the centuries. It has to be studied, assimilated and adapted to our present requirements. It must become an inalienable part of our spiritual and cultural equipment in our efforts to build a better future. "Theoretical thinking," wrote Engels, "is an innate quality only as regards natural capacity. This natural capacity must be developed, improved, and for its improvement there is as yet no other means than the study of previous philosophy."[12]

[11]M. Hiriyanna: *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 18.

[12]Engels: *Anti Duhring*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EARLY MATERIALISTS

MATERIALISM in India arose as a reaction to Vedic natural religion and the rituals and sacrifices associated with it. It is true that materialism as a fully developed system of philosophy appeared only between the seventh and the second centuries B.C., but there are reasons to believe that materialist ideas existed as early as the tenth or ninth century B.C., at least in a rudimentary form. It was a period of the decay and dissolution of the pastoral, tribal organisation of the early Aryans. Not only the epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, but also the earliest literary compositions like the Vedas and the Upanishads testify to the existence of materialist tendencies long before the rise of philosophies as developed systems of thought. Materialism, therefore, as Radhakrishnan has pointed out, " is as old as philosophy and the theory is to be met within the pre-Buddhistic period also. Germs of it are found in the hymns of the Rig Veda."[1]

Brihaspati Lanka of the Rig Veda is supposed to be the founder of Indian materialism. It was he who first envisaged matter as the ultimate reality. He and his followers denied God, opposed the conception of the immortal soul and a life beyond the grave.[2]

Brihaspati's disciple, Dhishana, regarded the propounders of Vedic rituals as a breed of swindlers. Parameshtin, another Vedic thinker, also treated matter as the ultimate reality and proclaimed that there was no possibility of knowledge of anything beyond original matter.

Bhrigu was another leading materialist of early times. He said : "Matter is the Eternal, for from Matter all beings are born and by Matter all beings exist and to Matter all beings depart and return."[3]

Traces of an opposition to the brahmins and to the sacrifices conducted under their auspices appear in some of the Vedic hymns.

[1]Radhakrishnan: *History of Philosophy*, Vol. I. p. 277.

[2]Dakshinaranjan Bhattacharya: *History of Philosophy*, Vol. I. p. 133.

[3]Quoted by Aurabindo Ghosh: *Life Divine*, p. 662.

The hymn on frogs in the Rig Veda, says Max Muller, is a satire directed against the Vedic priesthood and the practice of chanting mantras. Hiriyanna refers to a materialist thinker of the eighth century B.C., Parsvanatha by name, who had challenged the authority of the Vedas and the Vedic gods. The sage Yaska, in his "Nirukta," refers to one Kautsa who seems to have exposed the Vedas as meaningless and self-contradictory. Hiriyanna says:

> "This tendency manifests itself sometimes as doubt and sometimes as disbelief. But under whatever form it may appear, it sets itself against the orthodox teaching of the Veda. There is a whole hymn in the Rig Veda addressed to Faith which concludes with the prayer: 'O Faith ! Make us faithful.' Such an invocation, as Deussen has observed, would be unintelligible if we did not assume a certain lack of faith as prevalent in the age in which the hymn was composed. As other instances of unbelief, we may mention two hymns, also found in the Rig Veda—one which pointedly refers to current disbelief in the existence and supremacy of Indra and unbelievers in his majesty and power, and the other which ridicules the votaries of the Vedas by describing them as 'selfish prattling priests that go about self-deluded.' It was this tendency that in course of time gave rise to the heretical schools."[4]

During the time of the Upanishads, the attacks on priestcraft and sacrificial rites became intensified. A passage in the Chandogya Upanishad compares a procession of priests to a procession of dogs chanting: "Om, let us eat! Om, let us drink!" Some modern scholars have tried to give a totemistic explanation to this passage, and are emphatic that the reference to dogs does not suggest any contempt. But there is a passage in the Mundaka Upanishad also which compares priestly rituals and sacrifices to unsafe boats, trusting which fools are overtaken by old age and death. This cannot be explained away. Hiriyanna points out: "Thus, in the Mundaka Upanishad we have one of the clearest onslaughts against sacrificial ceremonial, in the course of which it is stated that whoso-

[4]M. Hiriyanna: *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 43-44.

ever hopes for real good to accrue from these rites is a fool and is sure to be overtaken again and again by death and decrepitude."[5] We have already referred to the materialist thought contained in some of the major Upanishads. One of the eighteen important Upanishads, the Svasanved Upanishad, is mainly devoted to materialist and naturalistic teachings. According to it, nothing but matter existed and there was no other world beyond this world. It declared:

> "There is no incarnation, no God, no heaven, no hell, all traditional religious literature is the work of conceited fools; nature, the originator, and time, the destroyer, are the rulers of things and take no account of virtue or vice in awarding happiness or misery to men; people deluded by flowery speeches cling to god's temples and priests when, in reality, there is no difference between Vishnu and a dog."[6]

Buddhist and Jaina texts refer to a number of materialist philosophers who lived at the time of the Buddha and Mahavira, and even earlier. Sixty-two such heterodox thinkers are mentioned. Among them the most prominent were Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesa Kambali, Pakidha Kaccayana, Nigantha Nataputta and Sanjaya Velathi Putta. According to the renowned materialist, Ajita Kesa Kambali, a human being was the combination of four elements (Chatur-maha bhutika) and the soul was nothing but the body: "There is no merit in sacrifices or offerings. And there is no after-life. Man is formed of the four elements: when he dies, the earthy in him returns to the aggregate of earth, the fluid to the water, the heat to the fire, and the wind to air; while his faculties (indriyani, the five senses and the mind as the sixth) vanish into space (akasa). Four men with the bier take up the corpse; they gossip (about the dead man) as far as the burning ground, where his bones turn into the colour of a dove's wing and his sacrifices end in ashes. They are fools who preach alms-giving, and those who maintain the existence of immaterial categories speak

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[6] Quoted by M. N. Roy: *Materialism*, Calcutta, 1951, pp. 77-78.

vain and lying nonsense. When the body dies, both the fool and the wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not survive after death."[7]

The views of Ajita Kesa Kambali, as recorded by the Sutra Kritanga, are quoted below:

"Upwards from the feet, downwards from the tips of the hair on the head within the skin's surface is what is called the (jiva) or what is the same, the atman. The whole soul lives. When this body is dead, it does not live. It lasts as long as the body lasts, it does not outlast the destruction of the body. Those who maintain that the soul is something different from the body, cannot state whether the soul (as separated from the body) is long or small, whether globular or circular or triangular or square or sexagonal or octagonal, or long, whether black or blue or red or yellow or white, whether of sweet smell, whether bitter or pungent or astringent or sour or sweet, whether hard or soft or heavy or light or cold or hot or smooth or rough. Therefore, those who say that the soul is different from the body are wrong."[8]

In the Buddhist account quoted above, man consisted of four elements. Akasa was not reckoned as a fifth. The Jaina Sutra Kritanga, however, refers to materialists who maintained that there were five elements. They did not deny the existence of the soul but maintained that it was produced by the five elements:

"Some proffer the exclusive belief on the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and air.

"These five gross elements are the original cause of things; from them arises the other thing Atman; for on the dissolution of the five elements, living beings cease to exist....

"Everybody, fool or sage, has an individual soul. These souls exist as long as the body but after death they are no more. There are no souls which are born again.

"There is neither virtue nor vice, there is no world beyond; on the dissolution of the body the individual ceases to be."[9]

[7] H. Jacobi: *Jaina Sutras, Introduction*, p. xxiv.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 339-341.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Another passage says that "as the earth, though it is but one pile, presents many forms, so the intelligent principle, viz. the Atman, appears under various forms as the universe."[10]

There were materialists who maintained:

"There are five elements through which we explain whether an action is good or bad, hell or not. Everything down to a blade of grass consists of them.

"And one should know the intermixture (Samavaya). Earth is the first element, water the second, fire the third, wind the fourth, and air the fifth. These five elements are not created, directly or indirectly, nor made; they are not effects nor products; they are without beginning and end; they always produce effects, are independent of a directing cause or everything else. They are eternal.... What is, does not perish, from nothing nothing comes.

"All living beings, all things, the whole world, consists of nothing but these five elements. They are the primary cause of the world even down to a blade of grass."[11]

"Here, therefore," as Engels said about the early Greek philosophers, " is already the whole original spontaneous materialism which, at its beginning, quite naturally regards the unity of the infinite diversity of natural phenomena as a matter of course and seeks it in something definitely corporeal, a particular thing, as Thales does in water."

There were also thinkers who maintained that there was a self besides the five elements:

"Some say that there are five elements and that the soul is a sixth, but they contend that the soul and the world (i.e., the five elements) are eternal.

"These six substances do not perish, neither without nor with a cause; the non-existent does not come into existence, but all things are eternal by their very nature."[12]

[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 342-343.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Pakidha Kaccayana held that in addition to the four elements —earth, water, fire and air—there were three more, viz. ease (sukha), pain (dukkha) and the soul (jiva). These seven things or kayas, as they were called, were eternal, neither created nor caused to be created; they were unchangeable and mutually independent. They were barren in the sense that nothing was produced out of them. True, the body was formed of these elements but then it was not a production, but a combination or aggregate of the elements. The elements themselves were uncreated. "What is, cannot be destroyed; out of nothing comes nothing."

Nobody can destroy the elements: " If a man cleaves another's head with a sharp sword he does not take life, for the sword-cut passes between the seven elements."

Makkhali Gosala, a contemporary of the Buddha and Mahavira, was the founder of the Ajivaka sect. The teachings of Gosala appear in Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, the Digha Nikaya and other Buddhist and Jaina works. He is reported to have told the king, Ajatasatru: "All vertebrates, all animals with one or more senses, all lives emanating from eggs or ovaries, all vegetable lives, become transformed into various forms by their different natures."

The Samanna Phala Sutta conveys the views of Makkhali Gosala in the following words:

> "Great king! there is no cause, nor any previously existing principle productive of the pollution of sentient beings; their defilement is uncaused and unproduced by anything previously existing. There is no cause nor any previously existing principle productive of the purity of sentient beings; their purity is uncaused and unproduced by anything previously existing. For their production there is nothing that results from the conduct of the individuals, nothing from the actions of others, nothing from human effort. They result neither from power nor effort, neither from manly fortitude nor manly energy. Every sentient being, every insect, every living thing, whether animal or vegetable, is destitute of intrinsic force, power, or energy, but being

held by the necessity of its nature, experiences happiness or misery, in the six forms of existence."[13]

The Ajivakas vehemently opposed the priestly rituals and ridiculed the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. They declared that not Brahman but the four material elements of water, earth, air and fire were the basis of the whole universe. Whatever occurred in the world was determined not by karma but by niyati (fate or necessity). The doctrine of niyati was directed against the priestly class and their theories and practices.

Kambalasvadhara, another famous materialist philosopher, explained that consciousness was produced from the body through the operation of the vital functions of prana, apana and other biomotor vehicles. He considered consciousness as the cognition of objects, and therefore, according to him, there could not be any consciousness in the early stages of foetal life with sense-organs in an undeveloped form. He held that the same kind of consciousness could not exist in two different bodies. The mental state of an elephant, for example, was different from that of a horse.

The Ajivakas, the Nigganthas and other heretical sects were often denounced as Pakhandas or Pashandas, because they were opposed to the Vedas and the Varnashrama system. The puranas sometimes ascribed social disorders to the existence of such heretics. According to the Vayupurana, "the Ajivakas are confusers of the varna, a people of workmen and craftsmen." This shows that many of the atheists and heretics like Gosala hailed from the artisan class and other oppressed sections.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great epics of ancient India, compiled in the middle of the first millennium B.C., depicting the life of the early Aryans when they were spreading out in India, contain many references to early materialism. For example, see how, in the Ramayana, Jabali expounds his materialist viewpoint to Rama: "Prince, your father, the king, is dead and gone, and that is the ultimate lot of everything that lives. It is now your chance to enjoy the royal fortune. Why not seize it?

[13]Max Muller (Ed.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XIV "Jacob's Introduction," p. XXV.

Don't follow a suicidal course. It will be to no purpose. Do you think that the cause of virtue will be served? I pity you, if you seriously think so. We really know of nothing else but earthly gain. They are realised by earthly means. Those who follow a course of religious piety really deceive themselves. They unnecessarily and unreasonably pass through a course of self-inflicted misery in their life-time, even though in possession of valued materials for happiness. When the time—the end—comes, they leave the world and all their resources behind. Do not believe that anything ever reaches the dead man from this world. The claims that the departed father partakes of the meals offered in obsequial sacrifices are mere humbug. When people offer these things in sraddha they indulge in a sheer waste of valuable food. Can a dead man eat? To ask another, a representative of the dead, to partake in the obsequial dinner is another piece of gross hypocrisy. If the food taken by one can go to another, then such ceremonies can be performed in the interests of absent friends and relatives also. Is it done? No, because the belief is not sincere, as it cannot be. The truth is that such religious injunctions have been framed by clever people simply to bolster up the doctrine of indiscriminate and extensive charity under a religious cover. Analyse all religious duties connected with sacrifices and vows and penances, you will find that at every stage they enjoin the fortunate possessor of wealth to spend for the benefit of others and give away as much as possible in gifts to the needy. But know it for certain, that after this life, beyond this world, man does not live. Trust only what your direct knowledge tells you and act up to it. Dismiss as unworthy of consideration anything based upon inferential knowledge or mere guess. Truth does not lie that way. I therefore exhort you to believe that your father has left you all for ever. Reasonably, you are bound to him by no consideration. Your chance has come, and make the best and fullest use of it."[14]

The Santi Parva in Mahabharata contains references to atheistic and materialistic doctrines in a more developed form than in the Ramayana or the Upanishads. They are dealt with in Bhishma's

[14]*Ramayana*, Ayodhya, 108—Tr. by Bhajabat Kumar in *The Bhakti Cult in Ancient India*, pp. 16-18.

discourses with Yudhishtira in which the views of different thinkers are expounded. Bharadvaja, for example, argued that life functions could be explained by physical and physiological causes, and that the assumption of a soul was unnecessary. The haitukas are referred to as well-read people who did not believe in the other world. There are also references in the Mahabharata to many moral and learned people who were heretics, and who did not believe in the soul or its transmigration, and who believed that the material elements were the ultimate.

The Mahabharata contains also clear and simple elucidations of various materialist theories such as Svabhavavada or naturalism, Yedricchavada or accidentalism, and Parinamavada or evolutionism.

Svabhava means nature. According to Svabhavavada, "Things are by nature what makes them." Every object, animate as well as inanimate, exists and develops due to its own inherent svabhava or nature. Thus everything is unique. The world is self-determined and not created by any supernatural agency. It arose out of material elements. The universe is nothing but the combination of innumerable individual phenomena. This does not mean that the world we live in is anarchic or ungoverned by any laws, but only it is self-determined, and that there is no external principle governing its laws. Svabhavavada refutes the doctrine of the transmigration of soul: "When experience clearly shows that all that constitutes a living being perishes, it is hard to believe in anything beyond on the basis merely of traditional teaching."[15]

In another chapter in the same parva, the danava chief, Bali, tells Indra:

> "The animating principle (life or jiva) and the body come into existence simultaneously, from their own nature (Svabhava). They grow together and meet with destruction together. As the final place of all rivers is the ocean, so the end of all embodied creatures is death. Those persons that know this well are never stupefied."[16]

[15] *Mahabharata*, XII (Santi Parva).
[16] *Ibid.*, 224 and 7-9.

According to the Mahabharata, Svabhavavada held (*i*) that things existed by their own nature, and (*ii*) that they arose accordingly from others that are different from, and that precede, them. By this view, nature was the producing and the sustaining cause; "all this exists by its own nature, without, in sooth, an eternal foundation and that all cause is due to the nature of things."[17]

Prahlada held that "all kinds of entities and nonentities come into being or cease on account of their own nature" and that "no kind of personal exertion is necessary for their production." The first cause of the world and its diverse phenomena must be sought in Prakriti or Nature and not in any supernatural power.

Yadricchavada (fortuitism or accidentalism), another theory figuring in the Mahabharata, also considers the world as uncreated, and refutes the conception of a supernatural power or Brahman. The sharpness of thorns, the variegated instincts of the birds and beasts, the sweetness of sugarcane and the bitterness of the nimba tree are all accidental and not the creation of any external agency. Yadricchavada upholds the materiality of the world, and declares that the universe sprang from the spontaneous combination of elementary particles of matter. But, unlike Svabhavavada, it regards every phenomenon as accidental and denies causation. As Hiriyanna puts it: "While the one (i.e. Yadricchavada) maintains that the world is chaos and ascribes whatever order is seen in it to mere chance, the other (i.e. Svabhavavada) recognizes that things are as their nature makes them. While the former denies causation altogether, the latter acknowledges its universality, but only traces all changes to the thing itself to which they belong. Both the doctrines are at one in rejecting the idea that nature reveals a divine power working behind it. Nor does either school seek for its views any supernatural sanction."[18]

In the course of his discourses to King Janaka, Panchasikha, a follower of Kapila, explains the views of the nastikas and sceptics who existed at the time:

[17] *Ibid.*, 237. 3-6.

[18] Hiriyanna: *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 103-104.

"The nastikas say that, when death is seen directly by all, they who hold on account of their faith in the scriptures that something distinct from the body called the soul exists are necessarily defeated in argument. They also hold that one's death is the extinction of one's soul, and that sorrow, decrepitude and disease indicate death of the soul. He who holds that the soul is distinct from the body and exists after the loss of the body entertains an unreasonable opinion. If that is considered as existent, which does not really exist in the world, then it may be mentioned that the king, being known so, is really never subject to decrepitude or death. But is he, therefore, to be really believed to be beyond decrepitude and death?

"When the question arises whether an object exists or not, and when that whose existence is asserted presents all the signs of non-existence, what is that upon which ordinary people depend in settling the affairs of life? Direct evidence is the basis of both inference and the scriptures. The scriptures can be contradicted by direct evidence. As to inference, its evidence is not much. Do not reason on inference only, whatever may be the subject. There is nothing else called an individual soul other than the body.

"The capacity to produce leaves, flowers, fruits, roots and bark lies in a banyan seed. The grass and water taken by a cow produce milk and butter, substances differing in nature from the causes. Various substances when allowed to decompose in water for some time, produce spirituous liquors whose nature is quite different from that of the substances producing them. Likewise, from the vital seed is produced the body and its attributes with the understanding, consciousness, mind and other qualities. Two pieces of wood, rubbed together, beget fire. Coming in contact with the rays of the sun, the stone called Suryakanta begets fire. Any solid metal, heated in fire, dries up water when coming in contact with it. Likewise, the material body produces the mind and its attributes of perception, memory, imagination, etc. As the load-stone moves iron, likewise, the senses are controlled by the mind."[19]

[19] *Mahabharata*: Santi Parva, 220. 23-29.

It is interesting to note that manas (mind) occupies a prominent place in the discourses of these early thinkers. Bhrigu tells Bharadvaja that an individual cannot perceive anything if his mind is preoccupied and that perception is possible only when the senses are joined with the manas. Panchasikha also speaks about the indispensability of the manas in perception. Of course, sense organs and objects are necessary but they are not enough. The objects can be perceived only when they are joined to the manas by means of the senses. The manas controls the senses as a charioteer controls the horses. Panchasikha even defines kshetrajna, that is soul dwelling in the human body, as an attribute of the manas.[20] According to him, manas is not a divine creation but only the most exquisite form of matter, the *paramam bhutham*, which at the time of dissolution becomes an inalienable part of the unmanifest prakriti, nature. He proclaims: "Rivers flowing to the ocean lose themselves in the ocean and do not retain their individuality; the final state of emancipation is a state of the dissolution of the separate material elements."[21]

Thus the controversy was not on the question whether the soul existed or not but whether it existed distinctly from and independently of the body. Did the existence of the soul, mind or intelligence, memory or consciousness, depend on the existence of matter or the material elements? Or, on the contrary, did existence of matter depend on the intelligent principle or consciousness? What was primary, matter or spirit? Those who adhered to the view that matter was primary were called materialists and those who believed that spirit was primary and that everything originated from consciousness or some intelligent principle were known as idealists.

[20] *Mahabharata*, Santi Parva, 212. 40.
[21] *Ibid.*, 212. 42.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOKAYATA

As we have seen, a number of materialist philosophers and a variety of materialist views existed in India between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. It was out of these views that Lokayata or Charvaka Darsana came into existence.

The word Charvaka is said to have been derived from the two words *charu* (beautiful or attractive) and *vak* (word), thus suggesting that Charvakas tempted innocent people by their skilful arguments, and made them materialists. Obviously, this name was coined by the idealist opponents of these theories as an expression of their contempt. Dasgupta explains that Lokayata (literally, that which is found among people) was the name by which all charvaka doctrines were generally known. Lokayata also meant a system of philosophy based on loka (this world); it did not recognise the concepts of heaven or hell or salvation. The Jaina philosopher, Haribhadra, in his commentaries on Lokayata, has pointed out that loka meant only the material world capable of being perceived by the senses. Haribhadra's disciple, Manibhadra, has interpreted the word to connote the totality of material phenomena. According to Radhakrishnan, Lokayata is the Sanskrit word for materialism. And Indian materialists were in general called Lokayatikas. Tradition attributes the origin of this system to the sage Brihaspati who, even during the time of the Rig Veda, had propounded the idea that matter was primary.

Modern research has not discovered any of the original works on the Lokayata Darsana, but there is no doubt that, at one stage in our history, some of these works were in vogue and had influence among the people. Max Muller has pointed out: "That some of the earlier philosophical Sutras were lost, is shown in the case of the Brihaspati Sutras. These are said to have contained the doctrines of the out-and-out materialists or sensaulists, the Lokayatikas or Charvakas, who deny the existence of everything beyond what is given by the senses. They are referred to by Bhaskaracharya

as Brahma Sutras III, 3, 53; and as he gives an extract, it is likely that they still existed in his time, though no MSS of them has been found as yet in India."[1]

Professor Tucci has drawn attention to the statement in the Buddhist work Divyadana regarding the existence of a bhashya and pravachana on Lokayata. According to Patanjali, the author of the Mahabhashya, Lokayata had a commentary by Bhaguri, who was one of the famous exponents of this system. Santirakshita, the author of Tattva Samgraha, mentions the name of Purandara who belonged to the Lokayata school. Kautilya refers to the Lokayatikas, and indicates that they had a system of philosophy similar to that of the Samkhya and the Yoga. He stresses the necessity for the study of the four sastras, viz. Anvikshaki; the triple Vedas (Rig, Sama and Yajur); Vartha (Agriculture, cattle breeding and trade); and Dandanithi (the Science of Government). Anvikshaki comprised the Samkhya, Yoga and Lokayata Darsanas. Kautilya states: "When seen in the light of these sciences, the Anvikshaki is most beneficial to the world, keeps the mind steady and firm in weal and woe alike, and bestows excellence of foresight, speech and action."[2]

Many idealist thinkers have quoted extensively from the older Lokayata works and have tried to refute them. Even in the fifteenth century A.D., Madhavacharya, an idealist philosopher of the Vedanta school, in his Sarvadarsana Samgraha took pains to present the Lokayata theories in a distorted manner; but the fact that even after so many centuries the opponents of Lokayata found it necessary to indulge in such vehement denunciations of it, testifies to the immence influence it once had on the popular mind. Max Muller says: "When we meet elsewhere with the heterodox doctrines of Brihaspati, they are expressed in verse, as if taken from a Karika rather than from Sutras. They possess a peculiar interest to us, because they would show us that India, which is generally considered as the home of all that is most spiritual and idealistic, was, by no means, devoid of sensualistic philosophers. But, though it is

[1]Max Muller: *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 86.
[2]*Arthasastra*, I. 2.

difficult to say how old such theories may have been in India, it is certain that, as soon as we get any coherent treatises on philosophy, sensualistic opinions crop up among them."[3]

The question, however, remains as to what happened to the basic works of Lokayata and the various commentaries on them. Where have they disappeared? The only inference possible is what Nehru has suggested:

> "Among the books that have been lost is the entire literature on materialism which followed the period of the early Upanishads. The only references to this, now found, are in criticisms of it, and in elaborate attempts to disprove the materialist theories. There can be no doubt, however, that the materialist philosophy was professed in India for centuries and had, at the time, a powerful influence on the people. In the famous Arthasastra, Kautilya's book on political and economic organisation, written in the fourth century B.C., it is mentioned as one of the major philosophies in India.
>
> "We have then to rely on the critics and persons interested in disparaging this philosophy, and they try to pour ridicule on it and show how absurd it all is. That is an unfortunate way for us to find out what it was. Yet their very eagerness to discredit it shows how important it was in their eyes. Possibly, much of the literature of materialism in India was destroyed by the priests and other believers in the orthodox religion during the subsequent periods."[4]

However this may be, the history of Indian philosophy has undoubtedly suffered a great deal by the loss of these books because, for a study of this great philosophical school which wielded such an influence on Indian social life, we are today compelled to rely on the interpretations given by the enemies of the system. The hostile commentators have described Lokayata as the philosophy that stood against all ethical codes, as vulgar materialism which advised man even to borrow from others in order to enjoy a life

[3]**Max Muller**: *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 97.
[4]**Jawaharlal Nehru**: *The Discovery of India*, p. 86.

of unrestricted indulgence in worldly enjoyment. So we are now reduced to the plight of having to delve deep into this sea of slander in order to discover the truth about Lokayata.

Still, all is not lost. Some of the basic tenets of the Lokayata system have been reconstructed by some recent scholars so that we are now in a position to understand some of the general principles of this ancient system of philosophy. The following is a gist of the Charvaka system as given by the great idealist Madhavacharya in his Sarvasiddhanta Samgraha.

"1. According to the Lokayatika doctrine, the four elements alone are the ultimate principles—earth, water, fire, and air; there is none other.

2. Only the perceived exists; the unperceivable does not exist, by reason of its never having been perceived. Even believers in the invisible never say that the invisible has been perceived.

3. If the rarely perceived be taken for the unperceived, how can they call it the unperceived? How can the ever unperceived, like things such as the horns of a hare, be existent?

4. Others should not here postulate (the existence of) merit and demerit from happiness and misery. A person is happy or miserable through (the laws of) nature; there is no other cause.

5. Who paints the peacocks, or who makes the cuckoos sing? There exists here no cause excepting nature.

6. The soul is but the body characterised by the attributes signified in the expressions, "I am stout," "I am youthful," "I am grown up," "I am old," etc. It is not something other than that (body).

7. The consciousness that is found in the manifestations of non-intelligent elements (i.e. in organisms formed out of matter) is produced in the manner of the red colour out of the combination of betel, areca-nut and lime.

8. There is no world other than this; there is no heaven and no hell; the realm of Siva and like regions are invented by stupid impostors of other schools of thought.

9. The enjoyment of heaven lies in eating delicious food, keeping company of young women, using fine clothes, perfumes, garlands, sandal paste, etc.

10. The pain of hell lies in the troubles that arise from enemies, weapons, diseases; while liberation (moksha) is death which is the cessation of life-breath.

11. The wise, therefore, ought not to take pains on account of (i.e. liberation); it is only the fool who wears himself out by penances fasts. etc.

12. Chastity and such other ordinances are laid down by clever weaklings. Gifts of gold and land, the pleasure of invitations to dinner, are devised by indigent people with stomachs lean with hunger.

13. The construction of temples, houses for water-supply, tanks, wells, resting places and the like, is praised only by travellers, not by others.

14. The agnihotra rituals, the three Vedas, the Triple staff, ash-smearing, are ways of gaining a livelihood for those who are lacking in intellect and energy, so thinks Brihaspati.

15. The wise should enjoy the pleasures of this world through the proper visible means of agriculture, keeping cattle, trade, political administration, etc."[5]

Giuseppe Tucci summarises the opinions held by the Charvaka school as follows:

1. Sacred literature should be disregarded as being false.
2. There is no deity or supernatural.
3. There is no immortal soul, nothing exists after death of the body.
4. Karma is inoperative, it is an illusion.
5. All is derived from material elements (mahabhuta).
6. Material elements have an immanent force (svabhava).
7. Intelligence is derived from these elements.
8. Only direct perception gives true knowledge (pratyaksha).
9. Religious injunctions and the sacerdotal class are useless.
10. The aim of life is to get the maximum of pleasure.[6]

[5]Tr. Prem Sunder Bose in *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 234-235.

[6]D. Ripe: *The Nationalist Tradition in Indian Thought*, p. 58, University of Washington Press, 1951.

In his digest of the Darsanas, Madhavacharya has elaborated the ideas and beliefs of the Lokayata philosophers. They believed only in the living world and not in another world. They did not believe in renunciation, moksha or the soul. They had no belief in a God who was the master of all creation. They raised a number of sceptical questions: How was it that the vast majority of the common people lived in misery and sorrow, if there existed an all-knowing, all-powerful and compassionate God? How could we, if a just God existed, explain the gross inequalities, cruelty and discrimination against the poor that existed in society? The existence of God could not be proved either by perception or by reason. So, they argued, there was no such thing as God, no supreme creator and controller of the destiny of the world.

The basic attitude of the Charvakas towards life and the purpose of living was different from that of the idealist metaphysicians who condemned them. The idealists considered the aim of life to be the attainment of moksha. To them, moksha meant a condition in which the soul was completely free of all worldly relations, and was beyond both sorrow and joy. The Charvakas did not think it possible for human beings to be absolutely free from feelings, or from sorrow and joy. Men experienced both joy and pain in the course of their lives. The need was to strive for a lessening of the sorrows and an enhancement of the delights of life, to strive to make life as happy as possible in this world, not to attain happiness after death. If a man might go to another world after death, why could he not come back to the earth to see his friends and relatives after death? When once the body was reduced to ashes, how could it even go to another world? Only this world was real to the Charvakas. True, it contained pleasure and pain. But, because there was pain, and because pleasure was mixed with pain, should we, therefore, renounce life? Should we throw away the paddy, rich with the finest white grains, simply because they might be covered with husk and dust? Such were their arguments. The Charvakas urged men to love this life and strive for happiness in this world.

The Lokayatikas vehemently criticised the priests and their craft, and mantained that the Vedic mantras chanted by the priests for

sacrifices had no divinity whatsoever. Some mantras did not convey any meaning, some were ambiguous, and some, contradictory. Some spoke of results which were never realised. Hence the Vedas were not only human compositions but worse. They were composed by buffoons, knaves and demons. Vedic rituals and animal sacrifices were all meaningless. The priests said that the animals sacrificed in the yajna attained heaven. If so, why did they not send their own parents to heaven by sacrificing them in the yajnas? All these, therefore, were only the devices of greedy brahmins to earn wealth by cheating the common folk.

The Lokayatikas pointed out also the stupefying effects of religion. Religion was as harmful as opium-intoxication. Prayer was the hope of weak men without the will-power to do anything. Worship was insincere egoism to save oneself from the tortures of hell. Prophets were the greatest liars among men.[7]

It must be stated that the Lokayata system did not rest content with such sharp polemics against Brahminism and priestcraft, but tried its best also to understand intellectually the basic cause and the structure of the universe and the nature of life. But for such investigation, the development of the various branches of ancient science in India would not have been possible. Many of the ancient scientists were exponents of materialism also. Charaka, the great teacher of ancient medicine, held, for example, that man was an evolution of time and the result of the wholesome combination of the elements: "The fact is that it is the very elements' wholesome combination that gives rise to the well-being of man." According to him, all the substances in the world, both animate and inanimate, were the products of the five elements.[8]

The Lokayatikas were opposed to the idea of a single primary cause for all phenomena. The world, in their view, was diverse in its nature. But, the diversity could not be attributed to God. The sweetness of sugar, the bitterness of the *neem*, the varying instincts of animals and birds could not be explained away as the work of God. Matter in its various forms had different inherent characteristics. The whole world came into being as a result of the

[7]D. Sastri: *A Short History of Indian Materialism and Hedonism*, p. 24.

[8]Satyaprakash: *Founders of Science in Ancient India*, p. 207.

unplanned combinations of the four elements—earth, air, water and fire. All nature was the result of the combination of these four primary elements in diverse proportions and forms.

Brihaspati's basic idea that life arose out of matter was elaborated by the Charvakas who explained that the origin of man and human life lay in a specific form of combination of the four elements. According to them, consciousness or intelligence originated from the combination of non-intelligent elements in the same way in which red colour was produced from the combination of betel, arecanut and lime. Liquor was taken as another illustration in point. Intoxicating drinks are made through the process of mixing some ingredients. Each ingredient by itself is not intoxicating. The inebriating power of liqour comes from a mixture of ingredients. Similarly, though the earth, fire, water and air individually have no vitality or consciounsness, a particular grouping of these in a particular form gives rise to a vital, living force. This living vitality is the soul or the atman and this atman lives only as long as the body lives. It is completely a this-world phenomenon. The Charvakas, thus, denied the independent existence of an immaterial soul. According to them, when the body perishes, consciousness also perishes, because consciousness is only a function of the body. So, the doctrine of transmigration also is false. "There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world."

Thus the Lokayatikas considered consciousness to be an attribute of the physical body which disappeared with the disintegration of the body. According to them, "all phenomena are natural. Neither in experience nor in hisotory do we find any interposition of supernatural forces. Matter is the only reality and the mind is matter thinking. The hypothesis of a creator is useless for explaining or understanding the world." Again: "The fire is hot, the water cold, refreshingly cool is the breeze of the moon. By whom came this variety? From their own nature was it born."[9]

The Charvakas firmly held that it was the living human body which performed the function of seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking,

[9]D. Sastri: *A Short History of Indian Materialism and Hedonism*

etc. When a man says, "I am lean," or, "I am fat," the leanness or fatness is a certain attribute of the body and the word "I" only means the living body. The expression "my body" does not signify a separation of "I" from "body." It is only a form of expression because "I" am not distinct from my living body. The live, functioning body with its vitality is itself the soul. To the question, "What is it that has made the lifeless body a living one?" the Charvakas replied that it was the result of a particular combination of the primary elements. They also explained consciousness and ability to think as the characteristics derived by the specific combination of the elements, and refuted the theory that consciousness could exist outside the physical body.

The Brahma Sutra of Badarayana has referred to the views of the materialists in the following Sutra: "eka atmanah sarire bhavat," which means: "some (maintain the non-existence) of a (separate) self on account of the existence (of the self) only where there is a body."[10]

Sankara explained this Sutra as follows :

> "There are some materialists who identify the soul with the body itself, and think that there is no soul distinct from the body. Under this belief they consider it possible that although sentience is not seen to belong to the external things like earth etc., taken either individually or collectively, yet it may belong to the elements transformed into bodies; and they say that sentience is but consciousness arising from them like the power of intoxication (existing imperceptibly in betels, etc.) and that a man is nothing but the body dowered with sentience. They also assert that apart from the body there is no soul able to attain either heaven or liberation and that the body itself is both sentience and soul. They adduce this reason: "its existence being dependent on the existence of the body." Anything whose existence depends on the existence of another, and which ceases to be when that other thing is not there, is ascertained to be an attribute of the latter, as, for instance, heat and light are attributes of fire. As regards such attributes as the activities of the vital

[10]Radhakrishnan: *The Brahma Sutra*, p. 498.

force, sentience, memory, etc., which are held to belong to the soul, they too are perceived within the body and not outside; and hence so long as any substance other than the body cannot be proved, they must be the attributes of the body itself. Hence the soul is not distinct from the body."[11]

The most significant aspect of the Lokayata system is its theory of knowledge. The Lokayatikas taught that the only way of realising truth was by direct perception or evidence of the sense. The idealists held that there were three sources (pramanas) of knowledge, *viz.* perception, inference and sacred utterance or sabda (of the Vedas). The Charvakas did not recognise sabda as a source of knowledge because they questioned the validity of the Vedas. But what about inference? According to Dhishana, a materialist philosopher, inference always depended on perception. Take the following example: Smoke comes from fire. We know by perception that it is true. But, an inference that wherever there is fire, there is smoke, or that wherever there is smoke, there must be fire, need not be true. According to the Charvakas, therefore, inferences may be correct when they are concerned with certain manifestations of nature, but they may be wrong when applied to certain other phenomena. Inferences are related sometimes to the past, and sometimes to the future. In the case of the past, they may be correct, but as far as the future is concerned, inferences may prove to be wrong. So, inference is not always a reliable method. Those aspects of the phenomena which are incapable of being observed and explained by direct perception are of doubtful validity. That is why the Charvakas argued that the only reliable source of knowledge was perception. To put it in other words, they stated that nothing that was beyond direct cognition was true or real.

The Lokayata theories arose at a period when the brahmin priests utilised their pramanas like inference and sabda to justify sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies. It became necessary for the Lokayatikas to combat them. And to combat them effectively, the fight

[11]*Brahma Sutra Bhashya* of Sri Sankaracharya, tr. by Swami Gambhirananda, p. 741.

against their conception of the sources of knowledge also became essential. It was thus that they developed a materialist theory of knowledge.

Such ideas, challenging the very basis of the priestly conceptions of soul, God, transmigration and salvation, sacrifices and rituals, were sharp weapons in the hands of the progressive forces in their fight against the domination of the brahmin priests. It was precisely for this reason that this school of philosophy attained wide popularity and wielded tremendous influence among the oppressed sections, and even among the traders and the kshatriya princes who were the rising new forces in a slave society. *The History of Philosophy*, prepared by a team of writers under the leadership of Radhakrishnan, records that at one time the Charvaka ideas constituted a tremendous force in social life. "Liberal efforts at improving existing institutions sanctioned by time and embodied in the habits of people," writes Radhakrishnan, "will remain ineffectual if the indifference and superstition of centuries are not shaken up by an explosive force like the Charvaka creed. Materialism signifies the declaration of the spiritual independence of the individual and the rejection of the principle of authority. Nothing need be accepted by the individual which does not find its evidence in the movement of reason. It is a return of man's spirit to itself and a rejection of all that is merely external and foreign. The Charvaka philosophy is a fanatical effort made to rid the age of the weight of the past that was oppressing it. The removal of dogmatism which it helped to effect was necessary to make for the great constructive efforts of speculation."[12]

Viewed from the standpoint of modern scientific materialism, our old Lokayata system of philosophy had obviously many shortcomings. It was only a form of spontaneous or naive materialism. "Spontaneous or naive materialism," wrote Lenin, "consists in the view that things, the environment, the world, exist independently of our sensations, of our consciousness, of our self, and of man in general."[13] The naive materialism of ancient India revealed the first rudiments of our knowledge of nature and the universe.

[12]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 283-284.

[13]Lenin: *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, p.63.

Although it lacked a solid, scientific basis, it contained many brilliant ideas which blazed the trail for social advance. It rejected supernaturalism and divine intervention in human affairs. It helped the people to break free of superstitions, and taught them not to hope for happiness in a world beyond the grave, but to strive for it here on earth.

Lokayata was thus a progressive, optimistic philosophy. It, in fact, made room not only for the great constructive efforts of speculation, but also the material welfare and cultural progress of the people. Dakshinaranjan Sastri has observed: "As the Lokayatikas captured the hearts of the cultured as well as the common people, all concentrated on working out their immediate earthly welfare. The result of this movement was the propagation of different arts and sciences."[14]

No wonder that in Kautilya's Arthasastra even the princes were exhorted to study Lokayata along with the Samkhya and Yoga systems.

[14]D. Sastri: *A Short History of Indian Materialism and Hedonism.*

CHAPTER NINE

EARLY BUDDHISM

"GREAT historical turning points," said Engels, "have been accompanied by religious changes only so far as the three world religions which have existed up to the present—Buddhism, Christianity and Islam—are concerned."[1]

Buddhism arose in the sixth century B.C. when the formation of large slave-owning empires became a historical necessity and when the intellectual, social and economic domination of the priestly class began to hinder the further development of society. Buddhism was anti-priest in its outlook and opposed to ritualism, and hence it was found to be more advantageous for the new times than Brahminism with its accent on the Varnasrama inequalities and the privileged position of the priests. We must not, however, suppose that as soon as Buddhism emerged Brahminism disappeared from the scene. India is a vast country and Brahminism, as Max Muller suggests, "may have continued to flourish in the West while Buddhism was gaining its wonderful triumphs in the East and the South."[2]

The early life of the founder of Buddhism is wrapped in mystery. There are innumerable legends about him in the Buddhist texts. Historians, however, with much difficulty have reconstructed his biography out of the stories about him and his sayings preserved by his disciples.

Siddhartha or Gautama Buddha, son of the Sakya king, Suddhodana, was born in the Lumbini forest on the borders of present-day Nepal in 567 B.C. King Suddhodana brought up his son in the lap of traditional royal luxuries. The pleasures of the palace, however, offered no attraction to the young prince whose sensitive heart was touched by the misery and sorrow which he observed all around him. This made him discontented with his own sheltered life. In his 29th year, he renounced all worldly attachments, his beloved

[1]Engels: *Ludwig Fuerabach.*

[2]Max Muller: *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 15.

wife, his one-year old child and the comforts of the palace, and took to the path of asceticism. He wandered far and wide in search of truth, seeking to find out the root causes of all human sorrow. For seven years he practised intense austerities and physical disciplines, performing yajnas through self-mortification and starvation for days together. But, at the end of all these trials, he found himself as restless and unhappy as ever. Then he turned to deep meditation on the supreme riddle that eluded him. At last, it is said, light dawned on him and he became "the Enlightened One," the Buddha. Gautama now wandered in various parts of India, propagating the new wisdom that he had attained. He tirelessly continued his mission till the end of his life in or about 483 B.C.

The path shown by the Buddha was the path of release from pain and suffering in the real, living world, and not of realising happiness in a life beyond. According to him, suffering was the basic fact of life. He taught the "four noble truths"—dukha, sadudaya, nirodha and marga (the reality of suffering, the cause of suffering, the possibility of ending suffering and the way of ending suffering). The eightfold path of ending sorrows and sufferings lay in right beliefs, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right mode of livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness and right concentration. During his famous sermon at Varanasi immediately after his enlightenment, he explained the "four noble truths" and " the eightfold path" as follows:

"What then is the Holy Truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also means suffering. In short, all grasping at (any of) the five skandhas involves suffering.

"What then is the Holy Truth of the origination of suffering? It is that craving which leads to rebirth, accompanied by delight and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there, *i.e.* craving for extinction.

"What then is the Holy Truth of stopping suffering? It is the complete stopping of that craving, the withdrawal from it, the

renoucning of it, throwing it back, liberation from it, non-attachment to it.

"What then is the Holy Truth of the steps which lead to the stopping of suffering? It is the holy eightfold path, which consists of: right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness, right concentration."[2]

The Buddha, thus, taught that desire was the root cause of all suffering. Whatever was caused could be ended by removing the cause. Therefore, suffering could be stopped by the elimination of desires. Well, how then could desire be eliminated? Both the extremes of indulgence in sensual pleasures and of intense austerity were unsuitable. A golden mean, the middle path (madyapath), had to be followed.

According to the Buddha, nothing came into being without a cause. All phenomena and objects, as in the case of suffering, had their own causes or effect-relations. A tree grew out of a seed and, therefore, the seed was the cause of the tree. There was a philosophical view that the growth of the tree was not the result of the transformation and development of the seed, but only the manifestation of the "tree-soul" which was inherent in the seed itself. The Buddha rejected this view, because in his opinion a new object arose out of the destruction of an old one. The events of the present, he said, were the inevitable consequences of the happenings in the past. This doctrine of the emergence of one as the result of the destruction of another was called "Prateetya Samutpada" or "dependent origination." This meant, in the Buddha's own words, "from the arising of that, this arises," or "when one thing vanishes or perishes, another is born," or "when this was, then this comes and it was then this becomes."

According to the early Buddhists, the effect did not exist in the cause; it came into being not as a result of the transformation of the effect of some eternal substance inside a cause, but when the cause vanished. Their relation to each other was only that one preceded or followed the other. The Buddha himself said: "I will teach you Dharma. That being thus, this comes to be. From the coming

[2] *Samyutha Nikaya.*

to be of that, this arises. That being absent, this does not happen. From the cessation of that, this ceases. This is the Dharma. Whoever accepts Dharma, accepts the law of "Prateetya Samutpada."[4] The new, therefore, was never a repetition or continuation of the old. The transformation of the old into the new was governed by the action of an objective general law of cause and effect. The most general law which organised and formed the empirical existence was called the law of Karma by the Buddha. It was due to this law of Karma that there was order and harmony in the universe.

Thus, Prateetya Samutpada meant that every process in the material and spiritual world was strictly deterministic. Everywhere the law of causality ruled. There was nothing without a cause. The cause necessarily produced an effect. The effect, in its turn, was transformed into a cause, a cause into an effect and *vice versa*. This process went on infinitely. The universe emerged without a creator, without a known beginning, and would remain for ever under the influence of cause and effect.

The philosophical foundation of Buddhism was its own theory of Dharma. According to this, all existence was a continuous stream and consisted of elements. The Dharma elements, a special substance penetrating all material and psychic phenomena, were momentary and, therefore, everything that consisted of elements—the world of appearance—had no real existence. The world, to the Buddhists, was a chain of momentary, instantaneous flashes, coming into being and passing away.

One of the main controversies among the early Indian philosophers, it should be noted, centered round their concepts of permanence and change. Some maintained that the only real being (Brahman) was one eternal substance without beginning or end, without change or movement. All change was only apparent, and everything was eternal in its essence. There were others who held that matter was an eternal principle, and that sense-data were the changing manifestations of matter. Buddhism repudiated both these views and argued that everything was changing every minute, and that all stability was only apparent. Matter or substance

[4]Rhys Davids: *Dialogues of the Buddha.*

did not exist in reality. There were only separate physical elements (Sarvam Prithak) which were impermanent and ever-changing. Every element was "dependently originating." "This being, that arises." Nothing was permanent. Nothing was stable. Everything was in a perpetual state of becoming. Dhammapada records an explanation of this concept by the Buddha: "Understand that everything that exists arises out of particular causes and sources, and that they are in all ways non-permanent. What appears to be permanent must also die. What ascends must also descend; what are joined together must separate; whatever is born must die."[5]

Life, according to Buddhism, was a ceaseless flow of being and non-being. The regular and ceaseless flow of motion and change created an appearance of uninterrupted continuity and changelessness. Water in a river flowed on without break. The saying that a river could be crossed only once was based on this continuity of the flow. But the flow produced an impression of the river remaining motionless and changeless. The flame of a lamp was burning every moment, burning up new matter and thus changing. And every moment a new flame was born out of the old flame. Yet, to the observer, the flame appeared to be the same, because of the similarity of organisation.

Buddhism did not recognise any basically immutable and eternal element—material or spiritual—as the root cause of the world. Buddhist doctrines even presented a theory denying the definite existence of anything whatsoever. Everything was void of eternal essence. In other words, there was no thing (vasthus) but only events (dharma). Since the world underwent incessant changes and all objects came into being and perished, the Buddhists held that matter was not eternal. As Stcherbatsky pointed out, "there were other systems of philosophy which preceded Buddhism, and which envisaged the sense-data as changing manifestations of a compact, substantial and eternal principle, the matter. Buddhism crushed this principle away; and the physical elements became just as changing, impermanent and flowing as the mental were found to be. No matter, no substance, only separate elements, momen-

[5] *Dhammapada.*

tary flashes of efficient energy without any substance in them; perpetual becoming; a flow of existential moments."[6]

This process was regarded as subject to the law of cause and effect. And since nothing in the world was beyond the operation of this law of causation, so even the atman or soul was not eternal and immutable. During the Buddha's time, there were certain philosophers who propagated the concept of an eternal, immutable atman, which was free from birth and death, and which could enter into any physical body at its own will. The Buddha firmly denied this concept; for, no object, material or spiritual, could be permanent and unchanging. The atman, according to him, was a fiction created by the aggregate of five groups of ever-changing, fleeting states—namely, body or matter, feelings, perceptions, impulses and acts of consciousness. Everything in the world, including man with all his belongings, could be analysed into these five groups or skandhas as they were termed.

As far as this doctrine of momentariness of all phenomena is concerned, there is no doubt that Buddhism presented a dialectical approach, which, though rudimentary, was philosophically much more developed than that of the early Greeks. Engels wrote twenty-five centuries later: "It is an eternal cycle in which every finite mode of existence of matter, whether it be the sun or nebular vapour, single animal or genus of animals, chemical combination or dissociation, is equally transient, and wherein nothing is eternal, but eternally changing, eternally moving matter, and the laws according to which it moves and changes."[7] Also: "Nothing is permanent but change." (Marx)

But it has to be admitted that the dialectics of the early Buddhists appeared only in a very general, naive form. They did not study analytically the relation between matter (body) and mind (consciousness). The inability of the early Buddhists to analyse the dialectical relationship between the general and the special, between reality and appearance, between accident and necessity, etc., led them inevitably to a metaphysical separation of one from the other.

[6]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, pp. 4-5.

[7]Engels: *Dialectics of Nature*.

The Buddha did not believe in God. He denied the existence of any all-powerful supernatural divine power creating and controlling the lives and destinies of the people. He observed: "It is said that the Absolute has created us. But that which is absolute cannot be a cause. All things around us come from a cause as the plant comes from a seed; but how can the Absolute be the cause of all things alike? If it pervades them, then, certainly, it does not make them."[8]

"He wished to study reality or experience," wrote Radhakrishnan, "without any reference to supernatural revelation. In this matter Buddha is at one with modern scientists, who are of opinion that the idea of supernatural interference should not be introduced into the logical interpretation of natural phenomena. Buddha had so firm a grip on the connected nature of things that he would not tolerate miraculous interferences of the cosmic order or magical distrubances of mental life."[9]

The Buddha's own life, simple but purposeful, with its great achievements, was the strongest refutation of the orthodox theory which denied the possibility of any non-believer in God leading a noble and useful life. On the other hand, he argued that faith in God often hindered right living, and speculation on God often led to inaction and the weakening of the sense of responsibility.

This, however, does not mean that he was a materialist; for although his anatmavada denied the concepts of God and soul, he did not recognise the life-process as confined to the body; he held that individual consciousness continued even after death. Of course, it was not the transmigration of self. What was transferred was not the ego-entity, but only thought forms. Death was regarded only as a break-up of a given combination of dharmas (elements) after which a new combination was formed. This continuous process of life and death was predetermined by Karma, *i.e.* the sum total of all sins and virtues of the previous births. In this sense, Buddhism believed in reincarnation of all living beings. In other words, it considered spirit higher than matter. which showed that his world outlook was idealistic. Rahul

[8]Carus: *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. XXIII.

[9]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 359.

Sankrityayan wrote: "In the Buddha's time, on the one hand, there were the atmavadi thinkers who considered the soul to be eternal and immutable. On the other hand, there were materialist thinkers, too, who denied the existence of the soul, although their materialism had not risen above the level of mechanical materialism. The Buddha and his followers propounded a philosophy which included several features of advanced materialism, but they were not prepared to call themselves materialists. The Buddhist thinkers had from the very beginning been insistent on adopting the middle path in all matters; and here, too, they wanted to keep themselves between theism and materialism, although with regard to non-eternalism they did not advocate the middle path."[10] In essence, this middle path led to idealism.

Though Buddhism denied God, its theory of Nirvana, even in the beginning, contained an element of idealism; for, as Stcherbatsky points out, "the analysis into elements and energies had no other aim than to investigate the conditions of their activity, to devise a method of reducing and stopping that activity, and so to approach and enter into the state of absolute quiescence, or nirvana. The ontological analysis was carried out in order to clear the ground for a theory of the path towards moral perfection and final deliverance, to the perfection of the saint, and to the absolute condition of Buddha."[11]

The Buddhist nirvana was a mysterious world of eternal bliss which denoted the complete cessation of the process of re-birth and the complete deliverance from sorrow and suffering which was supposed to be the essence of life. Buddhism taught that through self-absorption, contemplation and renunciation one could liberate oneself from the world of reality and attain nirvana. The Buddha called upon his followers to put an end to earthly sorrows and sufferings, not through struggles to remove their material causes in the real world, but through mental striving. This stub-born element of idealism came in handy, especially in later periods, for the Buddhist priests and the ruling classes to exploit the masses. Belief in the law of Karma, reincarnation, transmigration of the

[10]Rahul Sankrityayan: *New Age*, 1956.

[11]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, p. 6.

soul, and such other theories were encouraged by them in order to emasculate the spirit of the people and to maintain the old social order intact.

Wherever he went, the Buddha emphasised one simple tenet of faith: "Out of good arises good; out of evil arises evil." To him, this was the universal law of Karma, valid for all living beings. If this was the law of life, then prayers to God and the performance of yajnas, rituals and ceremonials had clearly no meaning. This was the trend of his teachings. Every phenomenon had its own law. Water always flowed down to a lower level. It could never flow to a higher level. Fire was hot, not cold. Prayer to a thousand gods could not change it. But then, good deeds would always lead to good results, and evil would beget only evil. This law could not be reversed by any kind of prayer.

The Buddha propounded his ideas at a time when the rigidity of Brahminism and the Varnasrama system had vitiated every sphere of social life. The Varnasrama laws were looked upon as having a divine origin because they were derived from the Vedas which possessed absolute divine authority. The Buddha, therefore, challenged the infallibility and authority of the Vedas, and refused to recognise the Vedic gods. He advised his followers not to accept or believe in anything which was irrational. The advice, he made it clear, was to be applied to his own teachings too. "As you test gold by melting it in fire," he said, "so you should accept my teachings only after close scrutiny."

The Vedic Purusha Sukta hymn had put forward a peculiar theory on the origin of the varnas. The brahmins were born from the mouth of Brahman, the kshatriyas from the hands, the vaisyas from the thighs, and the sudras from the feet. This gave the brahmins the pride of place in society. A later Buddhist philosopher, Dignaga, quotes the Buddha's comment on this theory: "The wives of the brahmins have their menstrual cycle; they become pregnant; they bear children, suckle them, and bring them up. And yet these brahmins, who are given birth to by women, claim that they are born out of Brahman's mouth, that they are the creation and successors of Brahman. This is utter falsehood."

The Buddha taught that a man had to be judged not by his origin,

i.e. by the varna in which he was born, but by the nature of his actions in life. A man of good character and good deeds was high-born while a man of mean character and bad deeds was low-born. In the Dhammapada, we find: "I do not call a man a brahmana, merely because of his origin. He is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy; but one who is poor, one who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a brahmana." And again: "Him indeed I call a brahmana, whose knowledge is deep, who has wisdom and who knows the right way and the wrong and has attained the highest end."[12]

The Buddha exhorted the people not to accept anything which was not consonant with reason and experience. In ringing words, he told Kalama:

> "Do not believe in what you have heard, do not believe in traditions, because they have been handed down for many generations, do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many, do not believe because the written statement of some old sage is produced, do not believe in conjectures, do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it."[13]

The Buddha taught that all people irrespective of their varnas were equal in "suffering" and that everybody had the right to attain liberation from suffering.

Compared to Brahminism, Buddhism represented a progressive world outlook and expressed in its own distorted manner the discontent of the oppressed people and their aspirations for social equality and a better life. That is why the Buddha's teachings attracted not only the wealthy kshatriyas and vaisyas, but even the poorer sections of the people. He called upon his followers to attain moral salvation in this world itself without the intervention of brahmin priests.

The Buddha denied all distinctions between the varnas; and, into the order of bhikkus (monks) which he founded, he admitted

[12] *Dhammapada.*

[13] *Kalama Sutra*: *Anguthara Nikhaya*, I. 189-90.

all, irrespective of their birth and position. Monastic life for moral perfection became the core of Buddhism. The brotherhood of monks was called the Samgha. Every monk was enjoined to observe poverty, celibacy and inoffensiveness. He was not allowed to possess any private property except a begging bowl, minimum robes and a razor for shaving his head. These rules of conduct had to be scrupulously observed.

There were rules of conduct for the laity also. They had to observe the Pancha Shila—the five precepts or commandments which were: To abstain from taking life; to abstain from taking what is not given; to abstain from going astray in sensuous pleasures; to abstain from false speech; to abstain from intoxicants tending to cloud the mind.

In course of time, however, the rules were relaxed. Asoka's patronage resulted in many changes. A part of the state revenue was transferred to the monasteries. The simplicity of monastic life disappeared and many chose monastic life because it offered an easy and luxurious life. This paved the way for the decay of Buddhism.

The kshatriya kings who supported Brahminism in the earlier epoch now appeared as patrons and friends of Buddhism, and helped the propagation of the new religion. We find, for example, king Prasenajit of Kosala and king Bimbisara of Magadha paying homage to the Buddha and drawing near him. In the third century B.C. when Buddhism became a mighty, popular movement, Asoka adopted it as his state religion and threw himself wholeheartedly against Brahminism; in flaming words he carried the teachings of the Buddha throughout the country.

Was the spiritual value of Buddhism the only attraction for the ruling class? Significantly, it was only when Buddhism spread among the people that the kings lent their support to it. They must have thought that their adherence to the new religion would give them not only an advantage over their brahmin rivals, but also increase their hold over the people. After all, the Buddha did not attack the economic foundations of the existing social structure. Though he upheld the elementary democratic features of tribal communism, and called for compassion towards the slaves, now-

here do we find him pleading for an end to the slave system as such, to the relationship between men as masters and slaves. This is not surprising; for, such an understanding of the need for ending the slave system was impossible in the period of the Buddha, when slavery was developing rapidly. This weakness of Buddhism naturally played into the hands of the exploiting classes, who used to obscure the class consciousness of the masses and keep them in subjection. The decline of the power of the brahmins was sought to be fully utilised by the kshatriyas and vaisyas, who were now on the ascendant; and the Buddha's doctrines of Karma and Ahimsa (non-violence) and his teachings on simplicity, voluntary poverty, abstention from sensual pleasures, inoffensiveness, etc. helped them in this respect. No wonder that the kshatriyas and merchants, as patrons of the Buddhist faith, donated large sums of money to the Buddhist monasteries and erected Buddhist pillars (stupas) in many parts of the land. They championed Buddhism throughout the country and abroad with a zeal that incidentally increased their trade. Rahul Sankrityayan, a great authority on Buddhism, wrote:

"Buddhist philosophy, in its basic form presented by the prateetya samutpada (dependent origination) and the theory of momentariness, was essentially revolutionary. It proclaimed that the whole world, society and man were undergoing changes every moment. Therefore, no purpose would be served by sitting back and yearning for the good old days that had gone by. So Buddhism called upon all to realise the changes around them and to work for social reform under the changing circumstances. Though this implication of the Buddhist prateetya samutpada was capable of frightening the rich classes, the theories of karma and pratisandhi could be reassuring to them. Precisely for this reason, the kings and emperors and rich men rallied behind him. Outside India—in Ceylon, Japan, China and Tibet—the kings took the initiative for propagating Buddhism. They knew very well that the Buddhist teachings did not suggest social revolution, but helped the maintenance of the existing social structure. The thoughts of the Buddha, with their appeal beyond the

boundaries of countries and the limitations of classes, directly and indirectly helped the expansion of the states. The Buddha desired the removal of the inequalities of the caste system, without dislocation of the economic structure of society. Therefore, several real problems and difficulties remained outside his schemes. Yet, people of the so-called "low castes" took to the teachings of the Buddha. From a class point of view, Buddhism looks like an attempt at arbitration by a representative of the ruling class."[14]

In actual practice, therefore, Buddhism was not a middle path. It appeared at a specific stage in India's history when Brahminism, which had earlier played a progressive role by helping the break-up of the tribal structure and sanctifying the rise of slavery, turned out to be an obstruction to the further expansion of the slave-system on the basis of large slave-owning empires, like the empire of Asoka. Buddhism, thus, served as a religion and philosophy of the developing slave-owning empires of ancient India.

It cannot, however, be denied that Buddhism with its emphasis on moral purity, non-violence, kindness and charity hada humanising effect on the kings and the slave owners. Even for the expansion and maintenance of a vast slave-owning empire and for the development of trade, a more generous approach to the slaves had become a necessity. It was under such conditions that kindness and charity, non-violence and peace, gained currency in the Mauryan Empire.

Emperor Asoka's insistence on kind treatment of slaves and servants is well known. In his Rock Edict, Asoka stated explicitly that the "law of piety" demanded among other things improvement in the living conditions of slaves and humane treatment of them. But for all his faith in compassion and non-violence, Asoka never attacked the foundations of the slave-owning system. On the other hand, his empire was based on the further expansion of slave-labour in India.

Asoka's death was the signal for Brahminism to raise its head once again. The reign of Pushyamitra saw vigorous onslaughts on Buddhism. However, the period of Kanishka's rule was marked

[14]Rahul Sankrityayan: *Visva Darsan.*

by a revival of Buddhist thought and activity, due to official patronage and encouragement. By this time, Buddhist doctrines had already undergone considerable changes in interpretation and application.

The Buddha had not set forth his doctrines in the form of a complete system of philosophy. As a matter of fact, there is no comprehensive or regular treatise on Buddhism extant. The Buddha's teachings had to be reconstructed from his innumerable discourses to and dialogues with his disciples, who after his death, set themselves the task of collecting and compiling them, mostly from memory.

After the passing of the Buddha, differences and dissensions appeared among his followers. This led to the emergence of different schools, each owing allegiance to the Master, but interpreting his life and teachings in different ways. Even the "four noble truths," in course of time, opened up possibilities for different interpretations which led to religious controversies later on. They were interpreted differently in different periods and in different countries, each group or class trying to use them as ideological weapons in its own interests. Later on in the book this topic is further discussed.

CHAPTER TEN

JAINISM

JAINISM was the world outlook of the followers of Vardhamana Mahavira, an elder contemporary of Gautama Buddha. Like the Buddhists, the Jainas too rejected the authority of the Vedas and opposed priesthood and its rituals. They, too, believed it possible to solve the riddle of the universe and to attain perfection without the concept of God.

However, their faith entailed the worship of certain prophets, called Thirthankaras who, on their own, had freed themselves from all kinds of wordly attachment. It was possible, according to Jainism, for any human being to realise absolute knowledge and attain absolute bliss through intense effort. This faith in self-reliance for achieving perfection was an integral part of Jainism.

Vardhamana Mahavira was considered by the Jainas to be the twenty-fourth and the last of the Thirthankaras, most of them legendary figures. Mahavira's predecessor, the twenty-third Thirthankara, was, however, a historical personage called Parswanatha who lived in the eighth century B.C. The followers and disciples of Parswanatha, known as nigandhas, constituted an influential religious sect in the sixth century B.C. The greatness of Mahavira lay in his efforts to resuscitate and renovate the doctrines and beliefs of this sect to suit the changed times.

According to Jaina traditions, Vardhamana spent his youth in the fullest enjoyment of princely pleasures. But, in his twenty-eighth year, he was attracted to a spiritual life. For twelve long years, like the Buddha, he, too, wandered about in search of truth, undergoing great hardships and the most rigorous austerities. Then came enlightenment and he was looked upon by his disciples as a Thirthankara. He devoted the rest of his life to the propagation of Jainism.

Jainism arose out of the same economic and social conditions which gave birth to Buddhism. It absorbed within itself the animistic beliefs of primitive tribal religions and emerged as a system

of philosophy through incessant struggles against brahmin priest-craft and Vedantic idealism on the one hand and the prevailing materialist views on the other. Both materialists and Vedantins were looked upon as heretics by the Jainas. Some passages of the Jaina text, Sutra Kritanga, are devoted to a refutation of the Vedanta view that the soul was the cause of everything.

Here, for example, is a discussion between Ardraka, a prince who joined Mahavira and vanquished many opponents of Jainism, with a Vedic priest and a Vedantin on the other side:

VEDIC PRIEST: "Those who always feed two thousand holy mendicants, acquire great merit and become gods. This is the teaching of the Veda."

ARDRAKA: "He who always feeds two thousand holy cats (*i.e.* brahmins), will have to endure great pains in hell, being surrounded by hungry beasts. He who disposes the law that enjoins compassion and praises the law that permits slaughter, and who feeds but a single unprincipled man, even if he be a king, will go to darkness, and not to the gods'.

VEDANTIN: "Both of us follow (very much the same) Law; we stood firm on it, and shall do so in the time to come; (we believe that) virtue consists in good conduct, and that knowledge is necessary for liberation and with regard to the circle of births there is no difference between us. But we assume an invisible, great, eternal, imperishable, and indestructible soul, who excels all other beings in every respect, as the moon excels the stars."

ARDRAKA: "If there were but one soul common to all beings they could not be known (from one another), nor could they experience different lots; there would not be brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaisyas and sudras, insects, birds and snakes, all would be men and gods."[1]

The Sutra Kritanga and other Jaina texts also contain passages attacking the various materialist sects who were popular at the time of Mahavira. These texts make it clear that the formation of Jainism as a religion and philosophy was influenced by the

[1] *Sutra Kirtanga II*: *Jaina Sutras* translated by Jacobi.

different thoughts and beliefs current in India between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. As Jacobi has pointed out, "the similarity between some of these heretic doctrines on the one side and Jaina and Buddhist ideas on the other, is very suggestive, and favours the assumption that the Buddha as well as Mahavira owed some of his conceptions to these very heretics, and formulated others under the influence of the controversies which were continuously going on with them."

For instance, Jacobi suggests that the Jaina world outlook embodied in the doctrine of Syadvada was established in opposition to the agnosticism of Sangaya Belatthiputta. According to the Buddhist text, Samanna phala sutta, this agnostic doctrine is as follows:

> "If you enquire of me whether there be a future state of being, I answer: If I experience a future state of existence, I will then explain the nature of that state. If they inquire, 'is it after this manner?' that is not my concern. Is it after that fashion? That is not my concern. Is it different from these? That is not my concern. Is it not ? That is not my concern. No, is it not? It is no concern of mine."[1]

In other words, the agnostics (the Agnanikas) declared that the existence or non-existence of anything that was beyond human experience could neither be affirmed nor denied. The Jaina philosophy of Syadvada, on the other hand, teaches that "every aspect of reality might or might not be," *i.e.*, that all knowledge of reality is only probable. It declares that the existence of a thing may be affirmed from one point of view (syad asti) and denied from another (syad nasti). The word *syad* literally means perhaps, may be, somehow or viewed from a particular standpoint. A particular aspect of an object might be true in a particular context; but, viewed from a different angle, the same might be wrong. To illustrate this, the Jainas were fond of quoting the story of the six blind men and an elephant. Each laid his hands on different parts of the elephant and concluded that the elephant was in the shape he had contact with. The impression of each man was true

[1] *Jaina Sutras*, XXVI—XXVII.

in a very limited sense, but it was not the whole truth. Similarly, an object existed in a particular form at a particular moment from a particular point of view, but was different from another point of view. A pot, for example, exists in an earthen form and does not exist in a watery form. It exists at a particular place and does not exist at another place. Both the propisitions are valid. It is, however, not possible to speak of a thing from a single stand-point that it exists and does not exist. The world, with its states of being and non-being, is in perpetual change and movement. Therefore, it is necessary to examine everything in its existence and in its relations to other objects. This leads to the *asthi-nasthi-vada* of the Jaina teachings, which means that a thing "is" and "is not" at the same time. The Jainas considered the theories of various philosophers to be in a similar position, *i.e.*, they contained some element of truth about the universe, but not the whole truth. Reality has many aspects and expresses itself in multiple forms. Either complete affirmation or complete negation of anything is, therefore, impossible.

Syadvada, thus, provided only for the conditional or relative recognition of all reality, because nothing was certain. It visualised seven different possible ways of speaking about a thing or its attributes. Somehow (or in a certain sense) it exists (*syad asti*). Somehow (or in a certain sense) it does not exist (*syad nasti*). Somehow (in a certain sense) it exists and does not exist (*syad asti nasti*). Somehow (in a certain sense) it is indescribable (*syad avaktavyam*). Somehow (in a certain sense) it exists and is indescribable (*syad asti cha avaktavyam cha*). Somehow (in a certain sense) it does not exist and is indescribable (*syannasti cha avaktavyam*). Somehow (in a certain sense) it exists and does not exist and is indescribable (*syad asti cha nasti cha avaktavyam*).

This Jaina "theory of sevenfold judgement" is a logical corollary of the metaphysics known as Anekantavada or the doctrine of the "manyness" of reality. It declared that reality had innumerable aspects, all relative. There were countless material atoms and countless souls which were real and existed independently. Each material atom as well as each soul possessed an infinite number of dharmas or qualities. In other words, reality was infinitely

complex (anantha dharmakam vasthu), multiform and ever-changing. Nothing, therefore, could be considered to be existing everywhere and at all times. Some aspects of reality could be known, but it was impossible to know all aspects. As knowledge of reality was necessarily relative and conditional, human judgement also was limited and conditional. Neither absolute affirmation nor absolute negation was possible. To put it in dialectics: It is and is not. According to the Jainas, there was nothing contradictory in this, because the affirmation and the negation were not made from the same standpoint.

Jainism held that there were two basic categories, jiva (the conscious, living, vital principle) and ajiva (the unconscious, lifeless, non-vital principle). Both these categories were uncreated and eternal and had independent existence; yet, they were interrelated. Jiva was the enjoyer, while ajiva was the object enjoyed. Jiva was identified with life and its essence was consciousness (chetana). It manifested itself through perception and intelligence. "What knows and perceives the various objects, desires pleasure and dreads pain, acts beneficially or harmfully and experiences the fruits thereof, that is jiva." The degree of consciouness might vary according to karma. The lowest living beings inhabitating the atoms of earth, water, fire and air were called sthavara or immobile jivas and had only one sense—the sense of touch. The higher living beings called trasa or mobile jivas had more than one sense. Some had two senses (*e.g.* worms), some three (ants), others four (bees) and still others five senses (higher animals and men). All souls were identical and became differentiated by developing different qualities like colour, taste and smell, and then quantitatively. For instance, the soul of an ant was as big as the ant while that of the elephant was as big as the elephant. In all these cases the soul was embodied in lifeless matter (pudgala) and, therefore, it could be known only if examined in its relationship with matter, just as non-living matter could be known, in the Jaina view, only if seen along with its relations with the soul.

But to the Jainas, the ajiva (lifeless or unconscious) aspect of reality did not mean matter only. Rather it consisted of five categories: pudgala (matter), akasa (space), kala (time), dharma (motion)

and adharma (rest). Matter or pudgala was eternal, uncreated and without beginning or end. It possessed qualities of smell, taste, sound, colour and the sense of touch and also quantity. Every material object was formed out of pudgala which was ultimately composed of very small particles or atoms (paramanus). Two or more atoms, when they combined, produced a skandha, aggregate. Matter, thus, existed in the form of atoms or in the form of aggregates. All objects in nature including human senses, mind and breath were combinations of atoms. Each atom occupied one point (pradesa) of space, but had weight and the capacity to move with enormous speed. "The atom," observed Jacobi, "may develop a motion of its own, and this motion may become so swift that by means of it an atom may traverse in one moment the whole universe from one end to the other."[3]

Matter could have definite states of existence and was subject to modification and change. The changes in the world occurred due to aggregations of atoms or their disintegration. The atoms themselves were not constant but subject to parinama (development), in the process of which they assumed new qualities (gunas). Unlike the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika doctrines in which there were different kinds of atoms corresponding to the four elements, Jainism held that there was only one kind of atom which, in the process of development, however, assumed different qualities, thus forming the elements like earth, water, air and fire. Heavier atoms moved downwards, and the lighter ones upwards. But, the Jainas insisted that the mind, breath, voice or sound could not exist independently of matter. All material objects had four gunas or qualities, *viz.* touch, taste, smell and colour which could be noticed in the atoms, too. But, no guna could exist without matter. The Jainas held that things were extra-mental realities and opposed the metaphysical theory which postulated the possibility of existence of qualities independently of matter; and to this extent they were materialists. An object, they said, was known with the help of the sense-organs which were the instruments of the jiva, the conscious. But, sense perception was impossible without contact between the

[3]Jacobi: *Atomic Theory*, p. 200.

sense-organ and the object. Jainism recognised the correlativity of mind and matter, and also the relation between the knower and the object to be known.

The Jainas also emphasised that knowledge could be perfected only by right conduct (samyak charita). Knowledge without right conduct was futile, and conduct without right knowledge was blind. Right conduct was necessary to destroy all karmic particles which bound the soul to matter, to overcome attachment to passions. Right conduct implied abstention from evil and a strict spiritual discipline in day-to-day life. According to the Jainas, one could achieve complete mastery over oneself by subduing the passions. Emancipation was to be acquired not by prayers, rituals and sacrifices, but by moral and spiritual discipline. That is why they attached great importance to the five great vows—non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), non-stealing, *i.e.*, not to take anything to which one was not entitled (asteya), celibacy or abstention from self-indulgence (brahmacharya) and non-possession or renunciation (aparigraha). Among these principles, non-violence was considered to be the most important.

Thus, the three doctrines of Right faith (Samyak darsana), Right knowledge (Samyak jnana) and Right conduct (Samyak charita) known as the Three jewels (Tri-ratna) constituted the foundations of Jainism. In other words, the path to deliverance was determined by perfect faith in Jaina, perfect knowledge in the teachings of Jaina and perfect observance of the rules of Jaina.

The Jaina conception of the soul was different from that of Buddhism. While the Buddhists denied the reality of a soul the Jainas believed in its eternality. Their "nirvana" was not a negation of the soul, but the achievement of the state of Thirthankaras and Arhats—*i.e.*, the natural state of the soul in its liberated and unembodied form. But the Jainas agreed with the Buddhists in denying the reality of a Supreme Power or God and both believed in the law of Karma. The will of God was substituted by the self-reliant mechanism of moral law.

Viewing the Jaina system of thinking as a whole, we find a lot of idealism in it; but it is also interlinked with elements of materialism.

It is powerful in its logic and analytical in its approach and it contains many elements of dialectics.

In course of time, especially in the middle ages, the philosophical views and religious beliefs of Jainism underwent many changes. The logic and dialectics of the philosophy rose to new heights, but along with that the idealist aspects also became stronger. Like the teachings of the Buddha, the teachings of Mahavira also were subjected to different interpretations. Jainism which arose through struggles against Brahminism and the Varna system was itself turned into different sects.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SAMKHYA SYSTEM

THE Samkhya school of thought, one of the oldest of the philosophical systems, exerted considerable influence on the ideological life of India for a long time. According to some scholars, the system was known as Samkhya because it stood for the realisation of truth not through Vedic precepts, but through rational and intelligent thinking. Samkhya philosophy, as Davies has pointed out, was "the earliest attempt on record to give an answer from reason alone, to the mysterious questions which arise in every thoughtful mind about the origin of the world, the nature and relations of man, and his future destiny."[1]

The legendary sage Kapila, regarded as the father of the Samkhya, is supposed to have lived in the seventh or sixth century B.C. This, as we know, was the period when the primitive communist society, with its clan-tribe structure, was dying out and Aryan civilisation was developing to a higher stage leading to the consolidation of class (varna) divisions and the institution of the state. In this background of developing economy, the first Samkhya philosophers professed their faith in reason and proclaimed that the universe arose out of matter, that nature was in a process of evolution, and life and vitality, thought and consciousness, were only the products of matter. Traces of Samkhya thought may be observed even in the Samhitas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata etc. In the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata, Prahlada explained the Samkhya point of view thus: "He who is acquainted with only the metamorphoses of nature but not with nature which is supreme and exists by herself, feels stupefaction on account of his ignorance. He, however, who understands the difference between nature and her metamorphoses is never stupefied. All things originate from nature. On account of one's certain conviction about it, one would never be affected by pride or arrogance. When I know the origin

[1]Davies: *Hindu Philosophy.*

of all the ordinances of mortality and when I am acquainted with the instability of all objects, I cannot indulge in grief. All this is endured with an end."[2]

The Mahabharata has also referred to thinkers who considered that both nature and soul were indestructible, unborn and eternal. But, they, too, denied the existence of a creator and controller of the universe. Yajnavalkya, for example, explained to Janaka:

> "On account of the indestructibility of nature in the matter of creation, Prakriti which is unborn, is considered as not subject to decay or destruction. Soul, again, is indestructible and unchangeable. The qualities of nature are destructible, but not nature herself. The learned, therefore, call nature indestructible. By undergoing changes nature works as the cause of creation. The results appear and disappear, but not the original nature. Hence also is nature called indestructible."[3]

Kautilya, in his Arthasastra, has, as we have already seen, made pointed reference to the Samkhya, Yoga and Lokayata systems. As Rahul Sankrityayan has pointed out, the great Buddhist poet and philosopher Aswaghosha, in his Buddha Charita, mentions a pre-Buddhist scholar who was a follower of Kapila and a Samkhyavadin. Richard Garbe, in "An Introduction to Anirudha's Commentaries on Madhavacharya's Interpretation of Sankhya Tenets" expresses the view that Buddhism had been inspired by the Sankhya philosophy, and that the Buddhist city of Kapilavasthu (modern Kathmandu in Nepal) was named after Kapila, the first Samkhya philosopher. Regarding the origin of Samkhya, Garbe says: "The origin of the Sankhya system appears in the proper light only when we understand that in those regions of India which were little influenced by Brahminism, the first attempts had been made to explain the riddles of the world and of our existence merely by means of reason. For the Sankhya philosophy, in its essence, was not only atheistic but also inimical to Veda. An appeal to Smriti in these Sankhya texts lying before us are subsequent additions.

[2] *Mahabharata, Santi Parva.*
[3] *Ibid.*

We may altogether remove the Vedic elements grafted upon the system, and it will not, in the least, suffer thereby. The Sankhya philosophy had been originally, and has remained up to the present day in its real contents, un-Vedic and independent of the Brahminical tradition."[4] The Samkhya and the Yoga, acording to Zimmer, "can be traced back in a partially historical, partially legendary way, through the long series of the Thirthankaras, to a remote, aboriginal, non-Vedic antiquity."[5]

Thus, originally Samkhya was not a Vedic system. Yet, when this philosophical school attained prestige and authority among the people, even the Brahminical thinkers were compelled to adopt some of its ideas with the result that, in course of time, Samkhya was recognised as an orthodox system. This necessarily led to the jettisoning of some of its fundamental concepts and the subtle infiltration of idealist strains into its thought. Hence arose a divergence between the original Samkhya and the Samkhya that became part of the orthodox Astika Darsanas.

The original and basic works on the Samkhya system are not available to us. The oldest work now extant is the Samkhya Karika which cannot be dated earlier than the second century A.D. Samkhya Karika has two important commentaries, that of Gaudapada (eighth century A.D.) and the Samkhya Tatva Kaumudi of Vachaspathi Misra (ninth century A.D.). Another important commentary was the Samkhya Pravachana Sutra written by Vijnana Bhikshu in the fifteenth or sixteenth century A.D. But it is not easy to get a clear idea of the original concepts of the Sankhya from these later works, because even before the second century A.D. the original ideas had undergone many changes. And, undoubtedly, the original ideas of the Samkhya system were in existence much earlier than the beginning of the Christian era.

The first chapter of the Samkhya Karika outlines the purpose of this school of philosophy. It says that the aim of life is the elimination of every kind of pain and sorrow by the acquisition of perfect knowledge. Men experience three kinds of sorrow, *viz*: (1) the

[4]R. Garbe: *An Introduction to Anirudhas' Commentary on Madhavacharya's Interpretation of the Sankhya Tenets.*

[5]Zimmer: *Philosophies of India*, p. 28.

intrinsic kind (adhyatmik) or that which arises from atman or oneself; *i.e.* from one's bodily and mental conditions such as disease, anger, malice, etc.; (2) the extrinsic kind (adhibhautik) or that which proceeds from external beings; *i.e.* inflicted by other men, animals, reptiles or birds; and (3) the superhuman kind (adhidaivik) or that which arises from divine causes, *i.e.* natural calamities like excessive rains, drought, thunder storms, etc. The Samkhya lays down the means to overcome these three types of sorrow—not temporary alleviations but a lasting relief. The Vedic priests taught that the ultimate purpose of life was the attainment of moksha and the way to it through sacrificial rituals. The Samkhya dismisses these as blind superstition. Yajnas, it says, are based on violence and hence impure. They are tainted with the slaughter of living creatures; the only way to achieve freedom from pain and sorrow is the attainment of the discriminative knowledge of the unevolved matter, the evolved universe and the knower.

The Samkhya system is based on the theory of causation called the Satkaryavada. This is also known as the doctrine of the identity of cause and effect. According to this doctrine, nothing could emerge from a void. Creation was only the new manifestation of something that had existed before, *Sat karyam asat akaranath*: "Whatever exists must have been caused as there can be no existence without acause" and, therefore, "a thing is not made out of noth ing."This meant that all the qualities seen in a product (karya) could also be found, at least in a subtle form, in the cause (karana) from which the product was created. Every phenomenon in the universe had a cause. Every cause produced its own effect. This was unavoidable, for, cause and effect were inseparably connected. For example, curd could be made only out of milk, not out of water. The potter shaped his vessels out of clay, not with cloth. An effect was inherent in a cause, as gingili oil lay concealed within the gingili seeds. Human effort did not create anything new, but only revealed the effect that lay within the cause or was connected with the cause. In other words, every effect must have existed previously in its cause. This is explained in the Samkhya Pravachana Sutra as follows:

"There cannot be the production of something out of nothing, that which is not, cannot be developed into that which is. The production of what does not already exist (potentially) is impossible, like a horn on a man; because there must of necessity be a material out of which a product is developed; because everything cannot occur everywhere at all times and because anything possible must be produced from something competent to produce it."[6]

According to Satkaryavada, therefore, the whole world presents itself as a series of causes and effects and this process of causality is inherent in nature itself. But, what then was the first cause, the original cause of the world? The objective world was born out of its basic cause which, in the Samkhya view, was Prakriti, nature or primal matter which, as Stcherbatsky points out, "embraces not only the human body, but all our mental states as well; they are given a materialistic origin and essence."[7]

According to Samkhya, all objects in the world including our body and mind, the intellect, the senses, etc. are the consequences of the transformation of prakriti. The whole universe has evolved out of this primal matter. But, the ultimate Prakriti has no origin, nor is it the result of any transformation. Kapila describes it as *amulam mulam*, a rootless root. "From the absence of root in the root, the root (of all things) is rootless."[8] The Samkhya philosophers summarised this principle thus: "The existence is produced from the existent. What exists not, can by no means be brought into existence. Oil is in the seed of sesame before it is pressed; rice is in the husk before it is pealed; milk is in the udder before it is drawn. Thus, an undistinguishable cause—an eternal nature—an all-pervading Prakriti, exists from eternity. Like a tortoise she puts forth her limbs and again retracts them within her shell. At the general destruction or consummation of all things (Pralaya), all the elements are withdrawn and all return to the first cause, the undistinguishable one, who is Prakriti." Again: "Prakriti or

[6]Monier Williams: *Indian Wisdom*, pp. 89-90.
[7]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I., p. 18.
[8]*Samkhya Pravachana Sutra*, 1-67.

primordial matter is one, eternal, uncaused, all-pervasive and independent. It exists independently of the seer or the knower."

The Samkhya Karika thus defines the difference between the unevolved prakriti and the evolved objects: "The evolved is caused, non-eternal, non-pervasive, mobile, manifold, dependent, mergent,conjunct (*i.e.* with parts) and heteronomous; the unevolved is the reverse of all these."[1] The unevolved may not be perceived, but it exists. The non-perception of that (*i.e.* prakriti) is due to its subtlety, not to its non-existence, since it is perceived in its effects.

Thus, the Samkhya traced the origin of the universe to the eternally existing, uncaused, all-pervading matter and, therefore, the world did not need a creator or creation.

Refuting the idealist doctrine of the Upanishads that the first cause was a spiritual principle called Brahman, the Samkhya taught that the world of plurality or multiplicity had gradually evolved from the first cause, prakriti or pradhana, which was non-intelligent and non-sentient, undeveloped and unformed. The universe and its various phenomena came into being as a result of the action and interaction of twenty-five principles or categories (tatvas) evolving out of the first cause, "as naturally and spontaneously as cream out of milk, or milk out of a cow." These twenty-five principles have been enumerated as follows:

> (1) Prakriti or pradhana (matter); (2) buddhi or mahat (intelligence); (3) ahamkara (self-consciousness or ego); (4-8) the five tanmatras (essences or subtle elements): sound, touch, colour, taste and smell; (9-13) the five Buddhindriyas (organs of cognition)—the eye, the ear, the tongue, the nose and the skin; (14-18) the five karmendriyas (organs of action)— the organ of speech, hands, feet, the excretory termination of the intestines and the organ of generation; (19) manas (central organ, or mind); (20-24) the five mahabhutas, or primary material elements—the earth, water, fire, air and space; (25) purusha (spirit or atman).

This process of evolution, besides, was the result of the interaction of three mutually dependent entities called gunas or qualities,

[1] *Samkhya Karika,* X, Jha's Translation.

inherent in matter—Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Even in this undeveloped, state Prakriti was composed of these three gunas. In the process of evolution, one or the other of the three gunas might preponderate in different objects. That was why there was an infinite variety of objects. Satva was the principle of consciousness. The preponderance of Satva quality gave lightness and pleasure. Rajas caused motion and stagnation, while Tamas produced heaviness and inaction. These were inseparable qualities of Prakriti. The qualities of an object could not be separated from the object itself because they were inherent in it.

The three gunas had contradictions and unity at the same time. Prakriti was the state of quiescence of Satva, Rajas and Tamas. As long as these gunas were in a state of equilibrium there was no world, there was only unevolved, undeveloped matter. Evolution took place as a result of the activity and the imbalance of the gunas. Changes in the qualities produced changes in prakriti also. The actions and interactions of the three gunas were the necessary condition for the development of unevolved matter and for the emergence of its evolutes. Each object that arose out of prakriti had these inherent qualities in different proportions. Hence their manifest diversity. At the same time all the qualitatively different objects and phenomena had one common property—matter; for everything had evolved out of prakriti. The sutra of the Samkhya Karika gives five different grounds for the evolution of all existences from prakriti or unevolved matter: "Because of the finite nature of specific objects, because of homogeneity, because of evolution being due to the efficiency of the cause, because of separation between the cause and its product, and because of the merging of the whole world (of effects) there is the unmanifest as the cause."[10]

Romesh Chandra Dutt explains the five grounds thus:

> "Firstly, specific objects are finite in their nature and must have cause. Secondly, different things have common properties and must be different species of the same primary genus. Thirdly, all things are in a constant state of progression and show an active energy of evolution which must have been derived from a

[10] *Ibid.*, XV.

primary source. Fourthly, the existing world is an effect, and there must be a primary cause. And fifthly, there is an undividedness, a real unity in the whole universe, which argues a common origin. It was this unity, this harmony in nature, which led some of the rishis of the Rig Veda to ascribe all created things to the One Unborn, and which led the sages of the Upanishads to postulate the existence of One Universal Soul. The agnostic Kapila noted the same uniformity and harmony, but his categories of evidence did not allow him to admit the idea of a Deity, and like the materialistic philosophers of the modern day, he referred all formal existences to primordial matter."[11]

The world emerged, in other words, by the metamorphosis of Prakriti from a lower to a higher stage. All material and spiritual factors in the world were the manifestations of the changes in Prakriti. First, buddhi or mahat (intellect) and ahamkara (ego) developed out of prakriti, one after the other. The functions of buddhi and ahamkara corresponded to the psychological functions of the mind. The Samkhya Karika describes the process of evolution thus: "From Prakriti (primordial matter) issues mahat (buddhi, the great principle); from this issues ahamkara (the 'I' principle) from which proceeds the set of sixteen; from five of this set of sixteen proceed the five elementary substances."[12]

The "set of sixteen" was made up of the eleven sense organs and the five primary elements. Of the eleven sense organs, five were buddhindriyas, organs of cognition—eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. Of the remaining six, five were karmendriyas, organs of action—voice, hands, feet, and the organs of excretion and generation. "Bare awareness, in respect of sound, etc. is acknowledged to be the function of the five organs of cognition, while of the five organs of action, the functions are speech, grasping, motion, excretion and sexual enjoyment."[13] The eleventh was the organ of observation: manas or mind. This, in the Samkhya view, was an organ of both cognition and action, since the sensory organs like

[11]Romesh Chandra Dutt: *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, p. 317.
[12]*Karika* 22, Jha's Translation.
[13]*Karika* 28, Jha's Translation.

the eye and the motor organs like speech were able to operate on their respective objects only when influenced by the mind. Samkhya Karika makes this point clear: "Of these (sense organs), mind partakes of the nature of both (sensory and motor); it is the 'observing' principle, and is called a 'sense organ' since it has properties common to sense organs. Its multifariousness, as also its diverse external forms, are due to the particular modifications of the attributes."[14]

Thus, there were three internal organs: intellect, the ego and the mind and ten external organs.

Through ahamkara (ego or the "I" principle or self-consciousness) emerged not only the eleven sense organs but also the five tanmatras (subtle elements), governing sound, touch, colour, taste and smell. From these five subtle elements arose respectively the five gross elements (mahabutas): ether (akasa), air, fire, water and earth. All objects of the organic and inorganic world were formed out of these material elements.

The Samkhya thinkers taught that not only the elements and the organs of the senses but the mind, the ego or consciousness and the intellect were all ultimately derived from matter. Thus, the mountain and the man, the star and the flame, our perceptions of them and our emotions about them, were all prakriti, although of different kinds. The only exception was the soul or purusha which, although independent of matter and eternal, was, nevertheless, linked with matter, *i.e.* with the corporeal body.

The word "purusha," however, did not denote a single atman or soul; for according to the Samkhya, there were innumerable purushas linked with prakriti, *i.e.* difierent individuals were born in this world and they exhibited different qualities and personalities. Their souls were not portions of the so-called universal soul because the Samkhya did not recognise such a concept. Each soul was separate. There was, moreover, a ceaseless process of action and interaction between prakriti and purusha. Yet, purusha was not an active force. Prakriti, indeed, was the basic primary cause out of which everything else evolved.

[14] *Ibid.*, 27.

Some writers have classified the Samkhya as a dualist system of philosophy and try to make out that the world originated from the union of prakriti and purusha; but it is obvious that their view is based on a misinterpretation of the Samkhya doctrines. It is true that according to Kapila both prakriti and purusha were uncaused and antecedent to all things, but at the same time he explicitly stated that the soul did not play any part in the origin of the world:

> "While both (nature and soul) are antecedent (to all products), since the one (soul) is devoid (of this character of being a cause), it is applicable only to the other of the two (nature)."[15]

Kapila also made it clear that there was no need of an external force to give the first impulse for the origin of the world from matter, because motion and the process of causality were inherent in the prakriti or pradhana itself. Even as mother's milk and water flowed mechanically, just so the pradhana (or prakriti) also, although non-intelligent, may be supposed to move from its own nature. Motion was, thus, clearly visualised as inherent in matter. Stcherbatsky has rightly paid a tribute to the Samkhya system in this respect: "The idea of an eternal matter which is never at rest, always evolving from one into another, is a very strong point of the system and it does credit to the philosophers of that school, that at so early a date in the history of human thought they so clearly formulated the idea of an eternal matter which is never at rest."[16]

Thus, the Samkhya tried to solve the fundamental problem of philosophy in a materialist way. According to the system, it was in the process of development of matter that the apparatus of thought appeared which was capable of knowing the objective world. But, while the Lokayatikas considered that consciousness was the result of a mere mechanical combination of the four elements, the Samkhya regarded it as the psychical quality of man evolved out of matter. Man emerged, in its view, only at a certain stage of material evolution. The collective whole of the five mahabhutas, the senses, the five subtle elements, manas, buddhi, ahamkara and avyakta, constituted the man. Karma, knowledge, pleasure and pain be-

[15] *Samkhya Pravachana Sutra*, 1.75.

[16] Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I.

longed to this conglomeration. Man could feel and enjoy and suffer only in this life; and consciousness could exist only in this conglomeration of psycho-physical elements. The soul did not exist independently of the body; it became a knower only when it was associated with the organs of cognition. Man, according to the Samkhya, consisted of three basic components: ten external and three internal organs, along with the tanmatras, formed the material substratum of the empirical individual, his "material soul" or linga (also referred to as the subtle body). This subtle body or the linga was the spiritual, psychological apparatus of the individual. It comprised the intellect, the ego, mind and the five subtle elements. Just as there could not be a picture without a substratum, or a shadow without an object, even so the instruments of experience could not exist without the subtle body. But the subtle body was not capable of experience, without a gross body. It could abide only in the body. The term linga here stands for the will, the "I" principle, and the rudimentary elements because they are the means of knowing, and these cannot subsist without a substrate.[17]

It was obviously not possible for these ancient thinkers to prove their theories by analysing and examining the various material objects in the world by means of physical and other natural sciences. Yet, as Lokamanya Tilak has observed, we cannot help marvelling at their philosophical insight: "Experimenting again and again on the various objects in the world, or determining their qualities by analysing them in various ways, or making a comparison between the organs of the bodies of numerous present and former living things in the living world, and such other present-day devices of the natural sciences were not available to Kanada or to Kapila. They have deduced their propositions from whatever material was before their eyes, and the propositions laid down by the Sankhya philosophers, as to how the growth or formation of the universe must have come about, are not much different from the scientific propositions laid down by modern natural scientists. As the knowledge of biology has grown, the material proof of these opinions can now be

[17]Radhakrishnan: *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*, p. 439.

given more logically and by the growth of knowledge of the natural sciences, human beings have undoubtedly benefited to a considerable extent from the material point of view."[18]

The Samkhya philosophers asserted that all physical and mental actions took place without the intervention of any force independent of matter. In fact, they have categorically stated: "The existence of God is not proved." The first chapter of the Samkhya Pravachana Bhashya contains the following sutras: "As Iswara can be neither free nor bound, nor be anything of a different character, there is no proof of his existence." (1.93).

"If free from desires and attachments, He cannot be the creator, and if bound, He must be as ignorant as we are. So, He cannot exist as the creator 'God'. Either way he would be inefficient: The sacred texts which speak of Iswara, are either glorifications of the free atman or homages paid to the perfect ones." (1.95).

The fifth chapter also contains sutras which dispute the existence of an eternal God. They oppose the argument that God created the world of pleasure and pain for all living beings in accordance with the law of Karma. If those who performed good acts were blessed with pleasure and evil-doers punished with pain, then there was no need of a creator. For "the accomplishment of results (phala) is not under the superintendence of a Lord (Iswara), because that is effected by karma."

These arguments were undoubtedly a great blow to the idealist philosphical trends. Yet, stangely enough, some modern writers try to classify the Samkhya as an idealist system of philosophy.

The difference between idealism and materialism is essentially this: while the former regards all objective reality and all true knowledge of it as dependent on some kind of consciousness existing independently of it, the latter regards the objective world as real and independent of mind or consciousness. In so far as the Samkhya Karika has clearly explained the existence and development of the whole universe primarily on the basis of the matter or prakriti, and has allotted only a secondary position to the soul or purusha, this philosophy is evidently materialistic in its essence. Furthermore,

[18]Bal Gangadhar Tilak: *Gita Rahasya*, pp. 205-206.

the Samkhya has advocated the existence of a plurality of purushas, and not one purusha alone. Those who have tried to interpret the Samkhya idealistically, however, asserted that the whole universe was the result of the interaction of prakriti and purusha, and that, as prakriti was lifeless, it could evolve into the universe only with the help of purusha (which again was explained as Iswara, the Universal God). This is, of course, only another way of saying that primeval matter modified itself into the world of nature by the action of some unknown, mysterious, spiritual principle underlying it. But such a conception is a distortion of the Samkhya. Even Sankara, the greatest idealist philosopher of the Middle Ages in India, had recognised the fact that, according to Samkhya thinkers, that "which is non-intelligent, evolves itself spontaneously into multiform modifications."[19]

Again, Badarayana criticises the Samkhya with the argument that achetana (non-intelligence) could not have been the cause of the world, as no conscious purpose could be attributed to it. Sankara's commentary on the Brahmasutra also refers to this position of the Samkhya: "As non-sentient milk flows forth from its own nature merely for the nourishment of the young animal, and as non-sentient water from its own nature flows along for the benefit of mankind, so the pradhana too, although non-intelligent, may be supposed to move from its own nature."[20] Again: "Beyond the pradhana, there exists (according to the Samkhya) no external principle which could either impel the pradhana to activity, or restrain it from activity. The soul (purusha), as we know, is indifferent (udasina); it neither moves to, nor refrains from activity."[21]

From all this, it is clear that the Samkhya philosophers looked upon non-sentient, primordial matter as the root cause of the world. Sankara is, of course, opposed to the conception of natural laws acting independently of our consciousness. He states his idealist position as follows:

"We must assume that, just as clay and similar substances are seen to fashion themselves into various forms if worked upon by

[19] *Brahmasutra*, II. 2.1.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*

potters and the like, so the pradhana also (when modifying itself into its effects) is ruled by some intelligent principle."[22]

But, the Samkhya is opposed to this position. It does not require the help of any spiritual principle to govern prakriti or to cause movements or modifications. It maintains that evolution of primeval matter takes place not because of any extraneous influence, but because of its own inherent qualities (gunas).

Some writers have attempted at a psychological interpretation of the Samkhya system. Zimmer, for example, has written in his "Philosophies of India":

> "The supreme contribution of Sankhya and Yoga to Hindu philosophy lies in their strictly psychological interpretation of existence. Their analyses of the micromacrocosm, as well as of the whole range of human problems, are presented in the terms of a sort of proto-scientific psychological functionalism.... For the primal state of self-absorption, or involution, which amounts practically to quiescence and resembles non-being, a state of intuitive inner awareness (buddhi) is evolved; this is antecedent to the notion of 'I' (ahankara), which is the following transformation; and through intellect (manas), consciousness then proceeds to an experience of (and to action upon) the outer world through exterior senses. The cosmogonic process thus is read, in terms of psychological experience, as the unfoldment of a perceived environment from an innermost, all-perceiving center. The naive myth becomes immediately, significantly structuralized: the world is understood as unfolding from a quiescent state of inward absorption; and introspection therewith becomes the key to the riddle of the sphinx."[23]

This interpretation would make some sense if, in the Samkhya view, buddhi and ahamkara had evolved before matter. But it is not so. The Samkhya basis of evolution is non-intelligent, inert prakriti and not "quiescent state of inward absorption." Any

[22] *Ibid.*, II. 2.2.

[23] Heinrich Zimmer: *Philosophies of India*, p. 331.

spiritual inwardness could be born only from the apparatus of the mind, which was evolved only from matter.

It is true that, in the Samkhya order of evolution, buddhi and ahamkara appeared earlier than the five material elements (mahabhutas) which constituted the world. The gross was supposed to have evolved from the subtle. The order has to be reversed. But in the Samkhya theory of knowledge, ahamkara and buddhi were conditioned by the material world. Only the material world gave content to thought. Without the external world no thought could exist; Kapila laid down: "Not thought alone exists, because there is the intuition of the external world. Then, since the one does not exist, the other does not exist. There is a void."[24]

Commenting on these sutras, Vijnana Bhikshu wrote: "The reality is not thought alone; because external objects also are proved to exist, just as thought is, by intuition. If external things do not exist, then a mere void offers itself. Because, if the external world does not exist, then, thought does not exist; for, it is intuition that proves the objective; and, if the intuition of the external did not establish the objective, then, the intuition of thought also would not establish the existence of thought."

The Samkhya philosophers recognised three pramanas or sources of knowledge, *viz.* (1) perception, or knowledge gained from the direct experience of the senses; (2) inference, or supposition from direct knowledge, in which what is perceived leads one to the knowledge of what is unperceived, through correct understanding of the relation between the two; and (3) verbal testimony, or authoritative statements in the Vedas, which must have arisen out of the experiences of wise men.

Perception meant the direct knowledge of an object received from its contact with some sensory organs or other of the knower. But the absence of direct perception did not preclude the possibility of the existence of an object; for cognition had its own limitations. For example, a bird that flew higher and higher to the skies could no longer be observed after a certain stage. Similarly, a grain of camphor when placed very near the eye could not be seen, nor

[24] *Samkhya Karika*, Book I, pp. 42-43.

objects lying on the other side of a wall. A person concentrating his attention on something did not sometimes see or hear anything else. Cow's milk and goat's milk might be mixed together, without anyone being able to distinguish between the two. Thus, there were definite limitations to knowledge by perception, and under such circumstances inference was helpful. An example often cited was the existence of fire being deduced by smoke. "There is smoke in the hills; therefore, there must be fire in the hills." Here, smoke, which was perceived, was related to the unperceived fire which must have caused the smoke.

The recognition of verbal testimony, aptavachana, as a source of knowledge, did not mean to the Samkhya exponents a superstitious faith in the infallibility of the Vedas or the Upanishads. Sruti and aptavachana were referred to only in the sense that they were reliable. The Samkhya philosophers regarded the Vedas and Upanishads not as creations of God, but of human beings. Aptavachana must, therefore, be consistent with perception and inference. Referring to the heterodox manner in which the Samkhya used the term aptavachana, Anirudha wrote: "Huge giants do not drop from heaven simply because an apta, or competent person, says so. Only sayings which are supported by reason should be accepted by me and others like ourselves."[25] And Radhakrishnan comments that the Samkhya "never openly opposes the Vedas but adopts the more deadly process of sapping their foundations."[26]

Kapila did not admit the existence of anything which could not be known by the three kinds of evidence mentioned above. He rejected the idea of a Supreme Deity or Brahman, because neither perception, nor inference nor reliable testimony proved its existence.

Knowledge of an object, according to the Samkhya Karika, was acquired when the ten external organs passed on their impressions from the object to the three internal organs—manas, ahamkara and buddhi. In other words, the external organs provided the internal with the sensual materials and then only these could act.[27] But,

[25]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 301.
[26]*Ibid.*, p. 302.
[27]*Karika*, 33.

it was also recognised that the external organs acted in the present time, whereas the internal, having no such limitation, could act in all the three points of time (*i.e.* present, past and future). This affords an additional elucidation of the Samkhya position that knowledge was essentially conditioned by the real, objective, material world.

All evidences, thus, tend to prove that originally the Samkhya was an atheistic and materialist system. This, however, does not mean that the Samkhya system entirely stands the test of reason, or that it arrived at a logical analysis of the self-movement and self-development of matter. In some respects, it did adopt ambiguous or contradictory positions. For example, the explanation of the initial break from the equilibrium of the three gunas in the unevolved state of matter, mulaprakriti, is far from clear. Even the conception of the three gunas and their so-called equilibrium in primordial matter seems to contain some nascent elements of idealist thought. Garbe says: "Indeed the Sankhya sutras show clearly recognisable results of Vedantic influence in many places, most plainly perhaps at IV. 3, which is a word-for-word repetition of the Vedanta sutra IV, 11., and at V. 116, where the Vedantic technical term brahmarupata is used instead of the proper expression."[28]

Even the Samkhya Karika is not free from serious faults which, being at variance with its own main position, may be due to later corruption of the text caused by interpolations. One Karika has defined purusha in such a way as could be interpreted in an idealist manner. On the one hand, it stated that the gross body was made of the five elements, and that buddhi, ahamkara, etc. were evolved out of prakriti. But on the other hand, it stated that purusha existed independently of prakriti. Of course, there was not only one purusha, but a multiplicity of purushas; and they were only "enjoyers, experiencers, or witnesses of prakriti." After stating that purusha exists since there must be a superintendent, since there must be an experiencer and since activity is for the sake

[28]Richard Garbe : *Anirudka's Commentary on Madhawacharya's Interpretation of the Sankhya Tenets.*

of abstraction,[29] the Samkhya Karika continues: "For the perception of Nature by the spirit and for the isolation of the spirit, there is union of both—like that of the halt and the blind and from this union proceeds evolution."[30]

If prakriti and purusha (or matter and spirit) were two independent entities and if creation took place as a result of their contact, the question would arise as to how and why these independent entities came into contact. Vijnana Bhikshu, who wrote a commentary on the Samkhya Pravachana Sutra, suggested that it was God who effected the necessary contact, that He created the purushas and the prakriti as His sakti (energy), and that between sakti and the possessor of sakti there was essentially no difference. Some modern writers also have followed such distorted interpretations. Satish Chandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Dutta, for example, describe the Samkhya as a philosophy of "dualistic realism."

"The Sankhya," they say, "traces the whole course of the world to the interplay of two ultimate principles, *viz*: spirit and primal matter (purusha and prakriti). On the one hand, we have prakriti which is regarded as the ultimate cause of the world, of objects including physical things, organic bodies and physical products like the mind (manas), the intellect and the ego. Prakriti is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. It is active and ever-changing, but blind and unintelligent. How can such a blind principle evolve an orderly world and direct it towards any rational end? How again are we to explain the first disturbance or vibration in prakriti which is said to be originally in a state of equilibrium? So, on the other hand, the Sankhya admits another ultimate principle, *viz*., purusha or the self."[31]

Thus, gradually both prakriti and purusha, matter and spirit, came to be interpreted as the primary causes — without genesis, eternal. And, in the hands of idealist philosophers, purusha and prakriti became equally independent, and also it began to be considered that both originated from Brahman.

[29] *Karika*, 17.

[30] *Karika*, 21.

[31] Chatterjee and Dutta: *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 292.

Notwithstanding such misinterpretations, a careful study of the available literature on the Samkhya makes it clear that the Samkhya, in its original form, was alien to idealism and theism. Indeed, the greatness of Kapila lay in the fact that his philosophical doctrines were essentially free from any subservience to the concepts of fate, supernaturalism and God. He made, in spite of the limitations of antiquity, a masterly attempt to develop philosophy on a rational, materialist basis. As Garbe pointed out: "it was in Kapila's doctrines that, for the first time in the history of the world, the full freedom of the human mind was established, and its faith in its own powers demonstrated."[22] And, precisely for this reason, the Samkhya philosophy has played one of the most significant and revolutionary roles in the history of Indian philosophical thought.

[22]Richard Garbe: *Philosophy in Ancient India.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE VAISESHIKA

THE Vaiseshika darsana is certainly one of the most realistic and systematic schools of philosophy in ancient India. Traditionally believed to have been enunciated by sage Kanada, its main body of thought is today found in about 370 sutras. The most significant contribution of Kanada to philosophy was the concept of the evolution of the world from atoms which alone, according to it, represented the ultimate reality.

According to Nandalal Sinha, who translated the Kanada Sutras and the commentary on them by Sankara Misra into English, Kanada must have lived between the sixth and tenth centuries B.C. As we have already seen, early Jainism conceived all physical objects as made up of infinitesimal atoms possessing qualities and linking into aggregates (skandhas). The Vaiseshika system must have developed out of this early conception of matter and must have been formulated and systematised into sutras in the post-Buddhistic period.

The Vaiseshika system attempted to understand and discover the fundamental realities of nature and the world. Kanada believed that only through the study of the specific qualities and characteristics (viseshas) of each and every aspect of nature and the universe could these basic realities be properly comprehended. Hence the name Vaiseshika for this school of philosophy.

According to Kanada, the world existed objectively, outside the consciousness of man and independently of it; and it could be analysed and apprehended by human effort. There were four methods of valid knowledge, *viz.* perception (pratyaksha), inference (laingika), remembrance (smriti) and intuition (arsha).

The Vaiseshika Sutras begin with the statement: "Now, we shall interpret Dharma." What was dharma? According to Kanada, dharma was not faith in God or in an eternal and divine destiny, but was that from which progress and ultimate good were possible. Lasting good could be achieved only through the knowledge of the

real entities. Knowledge was true only when it corresponded to the nature of the objects; otherwise it was false. Truth could be proved as such only by practical activities, based on that knowledge, becoming successful. The Supreme Good results from the knowledge of the essence of the various padarthas, their agreement and disagreement, their resemblances and differences.[1]

Category or padartha was the term used by ancient Indian philosophers to denote the classification of objects and phenomena. Reality consisted of innumerable, diverse objects, temporal and spatial, logical and mental. They had their activities, their attributes, their modifications and mutual relations. As it was impossible to analyse and understand all these objects and phenomena individually and separately, philosophers attempted to classify them as padarthas or categories, which meant the real entities corresponding to our words or concepts. This classification of things and their attributes, etc. changed from system to system.

It may be remembered that, according to Samkhya, emancipation was to be obtained by discriminative knowledge of the twenty-five principles. But, Kanada enumerated all predicable and nameable things into six padarthas. They were: dravya (substance); guna (quality or attribute); karma (action); samanya (genus or universals); visesha (species or particulars); and samavaya (combination or inherence). All phenomena of nature and the world, in the Vaiseshika view, consisted of these six categories of reality. Later, however, one more padartha called abhava (non-existence or negation) was sought to be added to the six by commentators like Sridhara and Udayana. Negation or the absence of something was considered to be as real as a thing that existed.

The basic padartha of the system was, of course, the dravya or substance. It was the essence of all material and non-material phenomena. Kanada defined dravya as "that which possesses qualities and actions and is an inherent or material cause of an effect."[2] The dravyas were nine: prithivi (earth); apa (water); tejas (fire); vayu (air); akasa (ether); kala (time); dik (space); atman (soul) and manas (mind). The Vaiseshika classified all physical

[1] *Vaiseshika Sutras of Kanada*, I, 1.4.

[2] *Vaiseshika Sutras*, 1.1.15.

and mental objects under these nine dravyas and discussed how by their combinations and aggregations the various objects and phenomena came into being. The analysis of substances and a study of their qualities constituted the method by which Kanada tried to unravel the mysteries of the universe.

All substances were not material. Earth, water, fire and air were material categories, being composed of indivisible atoms. Ether, time, space, soul and mind belonged to the non-material. Thus, all objects of experience, both material and non-material, came under the generic name of dravya. The mind and soul were as much elementary substances as fire and water. Unlike some other systems, the Vaiseshika did not consider time and space as unreal categories; they were as real as the other dravyas. The dravyas were the substrata, the basis, of the world. They were the causes of their aggregate effects, which, thus, became material objects. They existed in themselves and were knowable. They were not mere ideas or cognitions. They were objects of cognition. They were the basic categories in which action (karma) took place, and in which the various qualities (gunas) had their abode. Action and qualities were inherent in dravya. No dravya could exist without its qualities, just as no quality could exist without a dravya.

According to the Vaiseshika system, the whole was made of parts. Each substance could be divided into smaller parts. The ultimate constituent of material bodies was the extremely minute particle called the paramanu, the atom. All objects of the physical world had evolved out of such paramanus. The paramanu was the final infinitesimal particle which could not be divided any more. It was that at which the distinction between the whole and the parts ceased, and which marked the limit of division into smaller parts.

All paramanus, however, were not alike. They differed not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, in magnitude, weight, volume, form, etc. A mountain, for example, contained more indivisible particles than a mustard seed. There were different kinds of atoms which had different qualities.

Paramanus were eternal and indestructible. They constituted

the basis of the whole universe. The paramanus of the same class and of similar qualities combined themselves into aggregates to produce the various gross elements of the universe. The tendency to combine was inherent in the paramanus. There was no need for an outside cause to make them combine. An anu was the combination of two paramanus. A paramanu might be called a single atom, and an anu a double atom. There were combinations of three double atoms (tryanuka), four triple atoms, and so on. Neither the single atom nor the double atom was visible to the eye, but the combination of three double atoms assumed a visible form. Every material object was the combination of a number of anus. The world was the ultimate aggregate of all the objects in it; each object was the aggregate of a number of anus, and each anu was the result of the combination of paramanus. Thus, the whole world was made of paramanus or atoms.

The Vaiseshika maintained that the atom was neither dead, nor inert nor static. It changed and moved by its own inherent qualities, without the help of any outside agency and, thus, was dynamic. Matter was not a fixed being but a process of becoming. "Kanada's atoms," observed Max Muller, "are supposed never to assume visible dimensions till there is a combination of three double atoms (tryanuka), neither the simple nor the double atom being supposed to be visible by themselves. I do not remember anything like this in Epicurean authors, and it seems to me to give an independent character to Kanada's view of the nature of an atom."[3]

The primary atoms of earth, water, fire and air were eternal and uncreated, while the objects or compounds made of them by their very nature were liable to destruction and decomposition and, therefore, were non-eternal. A jar, for example, might be broken into innumerable pieces. But, its paramanus could never be destroyed. Matter could neither be annihilated nor created. It existed eternally. Sankara explained the Vaiseshika concept in a nutshell as follows:

> "In general, we may say that the parts inherent in any whole are brought together by conjunction; and that all things which

[3]Max Muller: *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy.*

consist of parts such as mountains and seas, or the four elements of earth, water, fire and air come out of the different combinations of four kinds of atoms. It is these things which can be considered as wholes of parts and which can ultimately be said to be produced out of atoms and disintegrated back into the atoms, at the time of the dissolution of the universe."[4]

Some modern scholars have expressed the view that the theory of the atomic structure of the universe had its origin not in Greece but in India.[5] They have also pointed out that the Indian atomic theory of evolution was really materialist in its essentials. It is true that Democritus, the ancient Greek philosopher of the fifth century B.C., did enunciate a theory of the atom as the ultimate constituent of matter. He explained that all bodies in nature were built up of minute, solid, impenetrable and invisible particles of matter which he called atoms. All changes were due to the combination and separation of these atoms. But, unlike Democritus, Kanada visualised the atoms as possessing the inherent attribute of coalescing and combining. He did not confine himself to the enunciaton of the theory of the atom as the prime cause of the universe. He analysed the relationship between substance and its qualities, between objects and their motion, between the general and the particular and between cause and effect to explain the phenomena of nature and the whole universe. Kanada's system, therefore, seems to be more self-contained than that of Democritus.

According to Kanada, each dravya had its own gunas. Seventeen gunas were enumerated by the original sutras: 1. rupa (form or colour); 2. rasa (taste); 3. gandha (smell); 4. sparsa (sense of touch); 5. samkhya (number); 6. parimana (quantity); 7. pratyekatva (individuality or variation); 8. samyoga (conjunction); 9. vibhaga (disjunction); 10. paratva (priority, or being alien); 11. aparatva (posteriority or being non-alien); 12. buddhi (intelligence); 13. sukha (pleasure); 14. dukkha (pain); 15. ichcha (desire); 16. dveshya (aversion) and 17. prayatna

[4] *Brahmasutra*, 1.12.

[5] *e.g.* William Fleming: *Dictionary of Philosophy*.

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[4] *Brahmasutra*, 1.12.

[5] *e.g.* William Fleming: *Dictionary of Philosophy.*

(volition or effort). Seven more were added to this list later on by Prasasthapada (end of 4th century A.D.). They were: 1. gurutva (gravity or heaviness); 2. dravatva (fluidity); 3. sneha (viscidity); 4. dharma (virtue or merit); 5. adharma (vice or demerit); 6. sabda (sound); and 7. samskara (refinement).

Kanada classified the paramanus according to the special qualities or characteristics (visesha) which they possessed. For example: 1. paramanus which originated odour; 2. paramanus which originated flavour; 3. paramanus which originated form and 4. paramanus which originated touch. Thus, there were four kinds of eternal atoms each possessing its own peculiarities.

This does not, however, mean that each dravya had only one quality or that all dravyas had all the qualities mentioned above. The idea was that each dravya possessed several of these qualities. Kanada classified them as follows: "Earth possesses odour, flavour, form and touch. Water has flavour, form and touch and is fluid and viscid. Fire has form and touch while air possesses touch."[6]

Generally speaking, colour, taste, smell, touch, priority, posteriority gravity, fluidity, viscidity and speed are qualities that belonged to the corporeal objects; intellect, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, effort, virtue, vice, faculty (tendency or samskara), and sound belonged to non-material objects; and number, dimension, separateness, conjunction and disjunction belonged to both.[7]

Kanada used the term Karma in the wide sense as derived from the root *kr.* to act. It meant not only human action, but all types of movement, because action consisted of motion. "Action is that which abides in one substance, which is without qualities, and which is the direct cause of conjunction and disjunction."[8] This will be clear when we know that the Vaiseshika visualised five kinds of action: upward motion, downward motion, contraction, expansion and progress. All these actions or forms of motion were realities inherent in corresponding substances. Like guna, karma had no function independently of the dravya in which it was inherent. Dravya was, thus, inseparably linked with, and formed the basis of,

[6] *Vaiseshika Sutras*, II, I, 1.4.

[7] *Padartha Dharma Samgraha*, VI. 47-49. (Jha's Translation).

[8] *Vaiseshika Sutras*, 1.1.17.

qualities as well as action. This meant that matter was in a state of continuous motion, change and development.

The common characteristics found in more than one object were called samanyas (universals). A particular cow (visesha) had some particular qualities. At the same time it had the characteristics common to all cows. Thus, we arrived at the particular in the general, the visesha in the samanya, the individual in the universal. Both were inseparably related to each other. Kanada said that a quality was considered as samanya when it was conceived as residing in difierent individuals, and as visesha when it differentiated a particular object from others.

The simple conjunction of two objects was known as samyoga. For instance, the relation between a bird and a tree was samyoga. It was not an inherent relationship, because they could be separated from each other. Both the bird and the tree could exist even after the bird left the tree. Or, take some pieces of thread tied together in a bundle. This was also samyoga. But, if the same pieces of thread were joined together in a particular way, *i.e.* if they were woven together, we got a piece of cloth. In the latter case, the relationship of the pieces of thread embodied an intimate specific union of objects. This was called samavaya or inherence which meant the inseparable relation between a dravya and a guna or between parts of an object and the whole of it or between motion and the moving object. It was not merely an occasional or separable connection. "The relation expressed by inherence," wrote Garbe, "subsists, for example, between the whole and its parts, the genus and the species, the particular object and the general idea with which it is associated, between a thing and its properties, between the movement and that which is moved."[9]

The question remains as to how exactly, in Kanada's view, the objective physical world evolved out of the eternal, imperishable particles. Was there an outside agency like God, or Brahman, at least to set the first primeval matter in motion? Was Brahman the ultimate or final cause of the world? Certainly not. Kanada declared categorically that not Brahman, but the eternal, un-

[9]R. Garbe: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. XII.

created atoms were the cause of the world. Since motion and the tendency to aggregate and combine were inherent in atoms, his system did not require the postulate of an outside agency or an unseen (adrishta) force to give the first impulse for the origin of the world. Samavaya was the principle that bound atoms together and produced various combinations. The entire world consisting of objective physical things and living beings with senses, mind, consciousness, etc. evolved out of atoms and existed as an enormous aggregate of objects interacting with one another in time and space.

The mind and the soul had separate functions in the system of Kanada. The qualities of the mind were: number, dimension, separateness, conjunction, disjunction, priority and faculty; and the qualities of the soul were: intelligence, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, effort, virtue, vice, tendency, number, dimension, separateness, conjunction and disjunction. "The ascending life-breath, the descending life-breath, the closing of the eyelids, the opening of the eyelids, life, the movement of the mind and the affections of the other senses, and also pleasure, pain, desire, aversion and volition are marks of the soul."[10]

The soul, here, was not used in the metaphysical and idealist sense of the term. It was only one of the substances to which belonged consciousness. Such a substance was conceived by Kanada because its functions could not belong to any of the other eight substances.

Kanada made it clear that consciousness, cognition, intellect, etc. were not inherent properties of a soul functioning independently of matter; on the contrary, they were products of complicated combinations of matter. The constituents of the soul were inherent in the substance which constituted the organism and did not exist outside or independently of it. According to Kanada, knowledge was produced only by the contact of the soul, and the senses with the object. He also stated that the soul could act only when it was united with the mind: "It is only in consequence of the soul's union with the organ of thought (manas) that its faculties are capable of activity."[11]

[10] *Vaiseshika Sutras*, III, 2.4.

[11] *Vaiseshika Sutras*.

The Vaiseshika allotted to the soul an important part in the act of cognition; but cognition was regarded as impossible without external reality. Substances which were external realities, and their qualities which likewise were real were picked up by our sense-faculties before the act of cognition. Stcherbatsky explained the process as follows:

> "Everything comes into the cognizing individual from without. All cognitions are experiences conducted by the apparatus of our senses into the cognizing soul, where they are sifted, ordered and preserved as traces of former experiences. These dormant traces are capable under favourable circumstances of being aroused and of producing recollections, which, being mixed up with new experience, creates qualified percepts (*savikalpakam prathyaksham*)...There are no images lying between external reality and its cognition. Cognition is, therefore, not introspective, it does not apprehend images; but it apprehends external reality, reality itself. Self-consciousness is explained as an inferential cognition of the presence of knowledge in oneself or by a subsequent step in the act of perception. The structure of the external world corresponds adequately to what is found in our cognition and in the categories of our language."[12]

Thus, whatever was experienced or cognised by us had a corresponding reality in the external world. That was why the Vaiseshika system maintained: "Experience is the sole criterion of our acceptance of the reality of external objects."

It is true that, in the Vaiseshika system, changes were regarded as occuring in consequence of addition or subtraction, conjunction and disjunction; and qualitatively different and new objects were not supposed to evolve in the process. Kanada could not grasp the existence of contradictions and forces in matter that brought about changes. Perhaps, in those days of antiquity, such an understanding of the intricacies of material changes was not possible. It was probably this weakness that prompted Kanada to enunciate the concept of a soul besides the mind as the source of vitality

[12]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, pp. 24-25.

and life. But, Kanada made it clear that the soul was not the creation of God. It was a basic substance, just like the earth, fire, water, etc. with its own special qualities.

Kanada conceived the universe as a structure of eternal atoms which had evolved into a complex system governed by the universal moral law of karma. This moral law of karma or adrishta was supposed to cause the motion of the atoms. The law of karma was originally an extension of the law of cause and effect which meant: "As you sow, so you reap," because every effect must have a cause. Even if the cause was not quite obvious, it had to be assumed that the cause was adrishta or hidden from sight. Thus, this adrishta appeared to be a strange mysterious agency; and it was used by commentators in later periods to introduce the agency of God into the Vaiseshika system. They agrued that the immutable atoms by themselves could not produce an ordered universe and so a presiding deity was necessary to regulate their activities. Hiriyanna observes: "The earliest extant commentary upon it is that of Prasastapada known as the bhashya, which probably belongs to the fifth century A.D. But it does not in its exposition follow the order of the sutras. It is a restatement rather than a commentary; and in restating the position of the school, it considerably develops it. For instance, the clear formulation of the doctrine of creation with God as creator is found for the first time in it in the history of the Vaiseshika school."[13]

Thus, it is evident that the Vaiseshika, too, like the Samkhya, was originally a rational materialistic philosophy, and that it, too, suffered distortions and misinterpretations at the hands of idealist commentators later on. This happened especially during the era of feudalism in India.

[13]A.M. Hiriyanna: *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 226.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE NYAYA

WHILE the Vaiseshika was mainly a study of objective reality in its various aspects, the Nyaya engaged itself in an investigation into the problem of knowledge in its relation to reality. It was, therefore, also known as Hetuvidya (the science of true reasoning and right judgement) and Pramanasastra (the science of valid knowledge). According to Stcherbatsky, it originated from the studies in the methodology of public debate. In other words, the Nyaya was the science of logic in ancient Indian thought. It provided a system of rational analysis and critical study of the subjects and objects in any branch of knowledge and, with the help of this, an attempt was made to solve the problems of life and reality. Vatsyayana defined it as a "critical examination of the objects of knowledge by means of the canons of logical proof." Thus, the theory of knowledge was the most valuable part of the Nyaya. Gautama Akshapada is supposed to have been the founder of this system of philosophy. Though nothing definite is known about the life of the founder or the exact period in which he lived, it may be reasonably assumed that this was one of the earliest systems of Indian philosophy. Satish Chandra Vidyalankar, in his work on Indian logic, has expressed the view that Gautama must have lived in the period of the Mahabharata epic. In any case, the fact that it was very popular in Kautilya's time, *viz.*, the fourth century B.C., is unquestioned.

The general principles of the Nyaya might have existed even before the time of Gautama. But, it was Gautama who formulated them into sutras, and reshaped them into a differentiated body of philosophic thought. The Nyaya Sutra of Gautama which is in five chapters, each divided into two sections, gives us a comprehensive exposition of the metaphysical and logical doctrines of the Nyaya system of philosophy.

The Nyaya bears great resemblance to the Vaiseshika, and often the two systems are studied together as the Nyaya-Vaiseshika

system. Like the Vaiseshika, the Nyaya, too, belived in an objective order of reals which existed independently of the cognising subject. Again, like the Vaiseshika, the Nyaya, too, accepted the atomic theory of cosmology, the theory of the unalterable, causeless, eternal, minute particles called atoms existing independently of the mind, as the ultimate reality. The universe, in its view, was constructed by the mere action and interaction of atoms. Also, like the Vaiseshika, the Nyaya was originally a materialist philosophy which did not assign any place to God or any other supernatural force in its view of the universe. The concept of the five eternal basic elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—was, of course, the cornerstone of Nyaya cosmology. It proclaimed the highest aim of man to be the attainment of nisreyasa, perfect beatitude, which was attainable only through perfect knowledge of reality. The Nyaya tried to explain the problem of human existence in the light of the laws of nature. It divided reality broadly into chetana (conscious) and achetana (unconscious), both existing independently, yet related to each other: mental realities were inseparably connected with extra-mental realities, *i.e.*, with objective external realities. External objects not only existed quite independently of mental realities, but they were a necessary condition for the various phenomena of the mental life. Every facet of mental activity was intimately associated with some external reality or other. And the existence of the conscious element was manifested only through the operation of the unconscious element. But, it was supposed that an eternal atomic element called manas existed and acted to connect the two and help the working of the physical world.

The Nyaya Sutra taught the view that the atomic elements (*viz.* earth, water, fire, air and ether), which constituted the world, were eternal and real and, therefore, there was no necessity for God or a supernatural causality to explain the origin of the world. It did not accept the role of God as creator of the material, real world. It was definite in its concept of the emergence of all living and non-living matter from the combination of paramanus, the ultimate minute particles. Garbe has asserted that "the fundamental text-books of these two schools, the Vaiseshika and the Nyaya Sutras, originally did not accept the existence of God; it was not until a subsequent

period that the two systems changed to theism, although neither ever went so far as to assume a creator of matter."[1]

In addition to the five basic elements, the Nyaya recognised four more varieties of the material content of the world—time, space, mind and soul. The characteristics of the soul or self (atman) were desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, attachment, aversion, will and volition. The soul could not exist or function without the body. The body, which was defined as the seat of action, the senses and what they intimated, was of course regarded as evolved from atoms. It was the field of experiences resulting from the contact of the soul with the outside world through the senses. The sense organs were the nose, the tongue, the eyes, the skin, and the ear. These sense organs, which also had originated from the basic elements, were the instruments of knowledge employed by the soul. "Knowledge or cognition is the mark of the self or soul."[2]

Buddhi or intellect was explained as being the same as apprehension or knowledge (jnana). It was the faculty of the mind (manas) to judge and understand things. The mark (or the argument for the existence) of mind "is that there do not arise in the self more acts of knowledge than one at a time." Vatsyayana explained: "If the proximity of sense organs to their objects, by themselves, independent of the contact of the mind were the sole cause of cognitions, then it would be quite possible for several cognitions to appear simultaneously." In the words of Max Muller, the mind prevented the rushing in of all sorts of sensuous impressions at once and regulated them in our consciousness.

The Nyaya, thus, did not at all deny the importance of the mind as an accessory for the realisation of truth. Nay, it stressed the importance of mental processes like inference, argument, reasoning, etc. But, it stressed at the same time that without direct observation of objects by the senses *i.e.*, without the direct relationship between the observer and the object, truth could not be perceived. According to Gautama, correspondence with the object was the nature of truth. If knowledge corresponded to its object, it was valid, if it did not, it was invalid. The proof of the pudding

[1]Richard Garbe: *Philosophy in Ancient India*, p. 33.

[2]*Nyaya Sutra* of Gautama, II. 1. 24.

was in the eating. Valid knowledge led to successful activity, while invalid knowledge led to failure and disappointment.

Objective existence of matter, independent of the mind, was conceded both by the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika. Objective reality existed prior to the cognising subject. The source of knowledge was conceived of as the inseparable unity of the subject and the object, of the observer and the observed. The Nyaya conception of knowledge was, thus, in direct opposition to the idealist doctrines, which considered objective reality as relatively unimportant or secondary, and the mind and its influence as primary.

But, above all, the Nyaya was more concerned with the process of reasoning and dialectics required for the attainment of knowledge than with the actual study of the qualities of an object. That is why the Nyaya Sutra suggested a different scheme of categories or padarthas. As we have already observed, the Vaiseshika took up the exposition of seven categories. But, the Nyaya included all those seven categories in prameya or object of knowledge which was only one of the sixteen categories recognised by it. According to Gautama, deliverance from evil and pain could be achieved only through knowledge of the truth in regard to the sixteen padarthas (categories). They were: pramana (proof or the methods of valid cognition), prameya (object of cognition), samsaya (doubt), prayojana (purpose), drishtanta (example), siddhanta (established tenet), avayava (members of syllogism), tarka (confutation), nirnaya (ascertainment), vada (discussion), jalpa (wrangling), vitanda (cavil), hetvabhasa (fallacy), chhala (quibble), jati (futility) and nigrahastana (occasion for rebuke). It may be noted that, out of these categories, pramana or methods of valid cognition was given the first place while the category of objects of cognition occupied only a subordinate position. This was so because the Nyaya was a philosophy primarily dealing with the methods of right knowledge. The soul (self), body, senses, objects of senses, intellect, mind, activity, fault, transmigration, fruit, pain and release were enumerated as objects of right knowledge.

One should have right knowledge about the various objects, otherwise it would lead to sorrow and suffering. But, how were they to be known? In accordance with the principle that "to

know the thing to be measured, you must first know the measure," Gautama attached great importance to pramana or means of right knowledge. Pramana was defined as that which was always accompanied by right knowledge, and was at the same time not disjointed from the proper instruments (the eye, ear, etc.) and from the soul. According to Gautama, the pramanas were of four kinds: perception (pratyaksha), inference (anumana), comparison (upamana) and verbal testimony (sabda). In other words, an object might be perceived by the direct experience of the organs of senses, by way of inferences, examples and comparisons, or by the knowledge and experience of the ancient sages. Pratyaksha was the knowledge which arose from the contact of a sense with an object; anumana was knowledge preceded by perception. Upamana was the knowledge of an object derived from its similarity to another object known earlier, and sabda was the knowledge transmitted by a reliable person.

Gautama's Nyaya Sutra defines perceptual (pratyaksha) knowledge as the "knowledge which arises from the contact of a sense with its object and which is determinate (well-defined), expressible in words, and unerring."[3] Thus, perception involved four factors, *viz*. the senses (indriyas), objects (arthas), contact of the senses with the object (sannikarsha) and cognition derived from this contact (jnana). But, perception or observation, according to the Nyaya, was only the beginning of the process of knowing, because seeing was not the same as understanding or cognition. Gautama has, therefore, enumerated the requisites for the realisation of true knowledge of an object: (1) the object perceived, (2) external requisites (for example, in darkness light is required), (3) the organs of senses (which are essential for perception), (4) the mind (without which the organs cannot function), and (5) the observer. The absence of any of these requisites might lead to serious mistakes. For instance, without proper light the object could not be properly observed. Similarly, if the eye was diseased, say, by jaundice, the observation could not but be erroneous. If the mind was disturbed or otherwise engaged, then also mistakes occurred in observation, and so

[3] *Nyaya Sutra* of Gautama, I. 1. 4.

on. Gautama introduced in his system categories like doubt, example, demonstration, argument, controversy, object, fallacies, reason and confutation in the process of acquiring knowledge. These categories were explained as methods of thought, by means of which errors and false notions could be avoided and genuine truth arrived at. For example, he explained that "doubt, which is a conflicting judgement about the precise character of an object, arises from the recognition of properties common to many objects, or of properties not common to any of the objects, from conflicting testimony, and from irregularity of perception and non-perception."

Men, generally, according to the Nyaya, did not err much in their perception because it was immediate knowledge not depending on any previous experience or reasoning. But, that was not the case with inference. One might often make wrong inferences leading to wrong conclusions. Hence Gautama dealt with inference in greater detail: Inference was the process of reasoning by which something unperceived was known on the basis of a known thing, the character of which was universally applicable. The existence of unperceived fire on a hill, for example, was inferred when smoke was seen on it and when it was remembered that smoke was always related to fire. He introduced syllogism to demonstrate the truth concerning a particular object or a statement. The five avayavas or integral members of the syllogism were: pratijna (proposition), hetu (reason), udaharana (example), upanaya (application of the example), and nigamana (conclusion).

The application of the members of a syllogism could best be explained by the following classic example:

Pratijna: This hill is fiery,
Hetu: Because it is smoky,
Udaharana: Whatever is smoky is fiery, as a kitchen,
Upanaya: So is this hill (smoky),
Nigamana: Therefore, this hill is fiery.

This syllogism with its five avayavas was supposed to be the most efficacious method of avoiding errors and was used in philosophical discussions aiming at the ascertainment of genuine truth.

Discussion, according to Gautama, "consists in the putting forward (by two persons) of a conception and a counter-conception, in which there is supporting and condemning by means of proofs and reasonings—neither of which is quite opposed to the main doctrine (or thesis), and both of which are carried on in full accordance with the method of reasoning through the five factors."[4] Gautama used his syllogism to oppose the views of the idealist thinkers of his time, who asserted that true knowledge depended on revelation and scriptural texts and relegated perception and inference to a secondary position.

The great significance of the Nyaya Darsana, thus, lay in its effort to use logic, reason and dialectics for the correct understanding and verification of perceptual knowledge for a full comprehension of the material, changing reality. And, as we have seen, the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika were originally atheistic systems of philosophy. But, they contained historically inevitable shortcomings and even anomalies, which were cleverly exploited later by idealist thinkers. In the period of feudalism, the adherents of the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, hard pressed by the idealist school, tended to compromise and temporise. It was then that efforts were made to revise their ideas and change them into theistic and idealist systems. Gautama in his Nyaya Sutra used the term atman to mean the soul or self, and stated that its mark was knowledge or cognition. Later commentators classified the atman as a jivatma or individual soul and a Paramatma or Supreme Spirit, and, thus, opened the portals for God to enter.

[4] *Nyaya Sutra* of Gautama, I. 2. 1.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE YOGA SYSTEM

ANOTHER school of philosophy, which arose almost at the same time as the Samkhya, was the Yoga system propounded by Patanjali. There is some controversy in regard to his period, some holding that he lived in the fourth century B.C., while others place him in the second century B.C. or a still later date. But, all are agreed that his contribution actually lay in condensing the already existing Yoga doctrines into 194 sutras or aphorisms.

The origin of the Yoga is lost in antiquity. Yogic postures depicted on the seals and stone statues discovered among the relics of the Indus Valley Civilisation indicate that it was prevalent in India even before the advent of the Aryans. There are references to the Yoga in the Upanishads also. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad, for example, there is an elaborate injunction about the Yoga which begins with the verse: "Holding the body in balance, with the three limbs (chest, neck and head) erect...." (II,8) The Katha Upanishad defines yoga, thus: "The holding of the senses and organs unperturbed and under control is called yoga by the adepts." (Katha II.III.2). The Buddhist and Jaina sources reveal that Yoga was in vogue among the philosophers of the sixth century B.C. Both the Buddha and Mahavira had devoted themselves for years to yogic practices before they became enlightened. In fact, most of the philosophical systems of the country attached considerable importance to yogic discipline. Of course, there were various forms of yogic exercises. Patanjali's greatness lay in compiling them into a well-knit system. Dasgupta wrote: "Of the Patanjali school of the Sankhya which forms the subject of the Yoga, Patanjali was probably the most notable person, for he not only collected the different forms of the yoga practices, and gleaned the diverse ideas which were or could be associated with the Yoga, but drafted them all on the Sankhya metaphysics and gave them the form in which they have been handed down to us. Vachaspati and Vijnana Bhikshu, the two great commentators

on the Vyasabhashya (the earliest commentary on Patanjali's Yoga sutra), agree with us in holding that Patanjali was not the founder of the yoga, but an editor. Analytical study of the sutras also brings the conviction that the Sutra does not constitute on original attempt, but is a masterly and systematic compilation which was also supplemented by fitting contributions."[1] Thus, the original yoga beliefs and practices must have been older than the philosophical discourses on them as found in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali.

The aims of the Yoga and the Samkhya were almost the same. Patanjali's objective was apparently the practical realisation of Kapila's concepts. Truth had not only to be discovered; it had to be realised also. Practical training was, therefore, as necessary as theoretical study. This was the mission of the Yoga.

Perhaps, this also explains the unique nature of the Yoga system propounded by Patanjali. To the Vedantins, Yoga was a means to the realisation of the self. "The self is to be realized—to be heard of, reflected on and profoundly meditated upon." (Br. II.IV. 5). In other words, Yoga meant constant meditation of "I am Brahman." To Patanjali, however, it meant stoppage of all mental transformations. He defined the Yoga as a philosophy of restraint of all mental activities (chitthavritthi nirodha): "Yoga is the restraint of mental modifications."[2]

The chittha or mind-stuff, which is possessed of the three constituent elements—satva, rajas and tamas, *i.e.* illumination, activity and inertia respectively—undergoes modifications when it is affected by external objects through the senses. The modifications are fivefold: real cognition, unreal cognition, imagination, deep sleep and memory. That particular state of mind in which the manifestations of cognition, imagination, etc. have been restrained by practice and control of desire is the state of yoga.

In other words, the Yoga was a spiritual effort to attain perfection through strict control of the body and the mind. This control had to be effected by a special system of physical culture and spiritual discipline. This was the mission of the Yoga.

[1] S. N. Dasgupta: *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 229.
[2] *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, 1, 2.

Taken as a whole, the Yoga Darsana appears to have adopted a blending of the evolutionary atomic concepts with the doctrines of the relationship between matter and spirit as conceived in the Samkhya system. The Yoga metaphysics was identical with that of the Samkhya. It adopted the twenty-five principles and three pramanas (*viz.* perception, inference and testimony) of the Samkhya system. The point of departure lay, however, on the attitude towards God. While the Samkhya rejected the idea of God, the Yoga recognised it. One of the eight steps of the Yoga practice, niyama, entails devotion to God along with physical cleanliness, mental contentment, etc. Sutras 23 to 29 also speak about Isvara or God. That is why some scholars are inclined to designate Yoga as Sesvara (theistic) Samkhya, thus admitting by implication the atheism of the Samkhya proper.

It may, however, be pointed out that Patanjali's concept of God was not the same as that of God as the creator of the world. Some modern writers like Richard Garbe have even asserted that the object of Yoga philosophers in including God in their system was merely to satisfy the theoreticians of idealist thought and to facilitate the propagation of the Samkhya theory. They point out the irrelevancy of God in the Yoga Sutra, and argue that the continuity of its thought would not in the least be impaired even if the references to God were omitted altogether. Garbe says:

> "In the Yoga Sutra the passages that treat God stand disconnected and are, indeed, in direct contradiction to the contents and aim of the system.... It is evident that this is no God in our sense of the term; and that we have to do with perplexing speculations the aim of which is to conceal the originally atheistic character of the system, and to bring the assumption of God into bare accord with its fundamental teaching. Assuredly these speculations prove that in the real Sankhya Yoga there is no room for personal God."[3]

Haridas Bhattacharya says: "The Yoga system had no intention to preach identification with and dissolution in God

[3]R. Garbe: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, XII, p. 831.

(or Brahman) as the ultimate condition of the finite soul. . . . Even when God is meditated upon, the ultimate purpose is to stop the activity of mind in its conscious and subliminal aspects, and to bring about the cessation of the modifications of the thinking principle. This alone explains why the Yoga manual can be, and has been, used even by those who do not believe in the reality of God."[4]

Radhakrishnan has expressed almost the same view: "The personal God of Yoga philosophy is very loosely connected with the rest of the system. The goal of human aspiration is not union with God, but the absolute separation of purusha from prakriti. Devotion to God is one of the several ways of reaching ultimate freedom. God is only a particular self (purushavisesha) and not the creator and preserver of the universe."[5]

It would, however, be wrong to conclude from this that the Yoga was a materialist system of philosophy. True, it agreed with many aspects of the Samkhya system. But, the acceptance of such a material basis was for subjective, spiritual purposes. The main emphasis of the Yoga was on the control of the mind and a mystical isolation of thought from the surrounding world by means of concentration and an elaborate system of psycho-physical discipline. In other words, it was a way of life to bring about the suspension of all mental activity and the conquest of desire.

The Yoga practice consisted of eight steps: abstention, observance, posture, breath control, withdrawal of the senses, fixed attention, contemplation and concentration (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dhyana, dharana and samadhi). By regulating and controlling the body, the senses and the mind through these eight steps, man was to raise himself from a lower to a higher stage leading to complete bliss.

The first two of the "Eightfold Path of Discipline" were the ethical prerequisites for yoga and had to be practised from the very beginning. Yama meant ahimsa (abstention from violence), satya (abstention from falsehood), asteya (abstention from stealing), brahmacharya (abstention from sensuous passions and lust) and

[4]Haridas Bhattacharya: *The Cultural History of India*, Vol. III.

[5]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 371.

aparigraha (abstention from avarice). All these were intended to overcome sensuous attachments and passions which distracted the mind.

The second step, niyama, meant the deepening of regular habits and observances by self-culture and includes internal and external purification (saucha), austerity (tapas), contentment (santosha), study (svadhyaya) fasting and devotion to Isvara, God. Devotion to Isvara was only a means to concentrate the mind. It may be mentioned here that Isvara was only one of the many purushas and, as Max Muller put it, "he never seems to have risen to the rank of a creator." The other steps were a series of highly skilled exercises meant to attain perfect control over both body and mind. The yogic postures, popularly known as yoga-sanas, included a series of physical exercises which were an aid to meditation and concentration. Pranayama, the system of regulated inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath, brought about serenity of mind. Pratyahara was a training to restrict the natural functions of the sense organs, withdrawing them from the sense objects. This helped to keep the mind still and calm. Dharana developed the powers of concentration, holding the mind focussed on a certain definite point like the tip of the nose or the mid-point of the eye brows. Dhyana or meditation was the focussing of the mind to a single idea in an unbroken current of thought. The eighth and the last step was samadhi. It meant the attainment of the object of dhyana by complete quiescence of the mind, the ecstatic state in which all connection with the external world was broken and man emerged in perfect freedom from his mortal fetters. This was kaivalya, bliss eternal.

According to the Yoga, "the reality of the self (atman) is to be found not by means of an objective use of the mind, but by a suppression of its activities and penetration beneath the mental strata with which our ordinary life and activity conceal our divine nature."[6] The aim was, thus, to reach perfection through a state of ecstacy in which the soul or self—the "I"—was completely separated from the surrounding physical world of reality.

[6]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 351.

It was believed that the elevation of man's physical and psychical powers and even the control of natural forces were possible through the practice of Yoga, and that proper exercise and control of the mind and the body could stimulate certain higher spheres of consciousness which enabled an individual to attain supreme happiness. In this sense, the Yoga was not materialist but idealist. Gradually, it lost its philosophical basis too and became almost a physical culture.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE MIMAMSA

THERE were two Mimamsa schools—the Purva (earlier) Mimamsa and the Uttara (later) Mimamsa. Both were essentially idealistic though there were significant differences between the two.

The Purva Mimamsa with its unquestioned faith in Vedic dogmas laid special emphasis on the earlier parts of the Vedas, *i.e.* the mantras and the Brahmanas, while the Uttara Mimamsa was based on the Upanishads. The Purva Mimamsa was preoccupied with rituals and sacrifices, and the Uttara Mimamsa with knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, Brahman. The former was in the main practical while the latter speculative. In popular parlance, the Purva Mimamsa later came to be known as the Mimamsa proper and the Uttara Mimamsa as the Vedanta philosophy.

The word Mimamsa means systematic investigation. The Mimamsa philosophy aimed at a systematic inquiry into the rituals and sacrifices of the Brahmanas, known as the Karmakanda.

The founder of Mimamsa is believed to be Jaimini. His date again is a subject of controversy. According to Radhakrishnan, he lived in the fourth centuries B.C. Hiriyanna says that he lived between the third and the second centuries B.C. Patanjali, who lived in the middle of the second century, has dealt with Mimamsa in his Mahabhashya and, therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that Jaimini must have lived before that period. It was a period of consolidation and development of the Varnasrama system.

Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra forms a work on rituals prescribing injunctions and prohibitions. The early Indian philosophers had enunciated the three objectives of human life—dharma (duty), artha (wealth), and kama (passion or desire). Later thinkers, however, added moksha or salvation also to the list. The Mimamsa sutras numbering about three thousand and incorporated in twelve chapters mainly deal with Dharma. The very first sutra began with an enquiry into its nature.

Jaimini's Dharma was based on the Vedas. He defined it as

a command to action, accompanied by promise of rewards in future life. That was the impulsion (chodana) for men to act. For instance, "let one desirous of heaven perform an agnihotra sacrifice"; or, "let one desirous of sense organs perform a homa sacrifice."

The Mimamsa Sutra also contains the details of various sacrifices. In this scheme of things, there was no place for a bestower of rewards, for, it was assumed that every action produced its own results. Actions were divided into three kinds. There were obligatory acts, the violation of which resulted in sin. Then there were optional acts, the performance of which would earn merit, and finally there were prohibited acts, those which would prove disadvantageous or harmful to man. These injunctions and prohibitions were not laid down by man or God but by the Vedas. The Vedas and Brahmanas were highly esteemed by the Mimamsakas because they were necessary for karma which meant religious rituals and ceremonies. The basis of human life was karma, they declared; without karma, knowledge was purposeless, and man could not attain his objectives. During the early Vedic period, yajnas were performed to please the gods like Agni, Varuna, Surya and Indra. The Mimamsakas revived these yajnas, but at the same time attributed new meaning to them. They were to be performed not for pleasing the gods, nor for purification of the soul, but because the Vedas and Brahmanas prescribed them.

The Mimamsakas attached a mysterious sanctity to the Vedas. According to Jaimini, they were eternal and self-revealed, not composed by men or even by the gods. The ultimate truth of the Vedas was to be attained through the medium of sabda (sound). Sound took the form of words. So, both the words and sounds of the Vedas had to be studied, and the ideas implied in them had to be grasped fully. The Mimamsa theorists tried to show that their faith in the Vedas was not blind; they sought the help of reason to establish the validity and unquestionable authority of the Vedas; but, their reasoning only took them into deeper waters of mysticism. Jaimini's Nitya Sabda Siddhanta, the doctrine of the eternity of sound, is an instance in point. In enunciating this, Jaimini was trying to reply to the argument that the Vedas were

composed of words and that words, after all, were created, and hence the Vedas could not have been eternal or without a beginning. Jaimini argued that words were not the same as the sounds we heard. What was uttered by the speaker and heard by the listener was only the sound of words. And the words were in reality composed of letters, which were constant and eternal. The sound made the words clear. Jaimini was not concerned with the fact that, in different places and at different times, letters found utterance in different ways; according to him, the change was only in pronunciation and explanation, the letters as such remaining constant and eternal. A ray of light only illuminated an object upon which it fell, but did not create it. Likewise, chanting or articulation only manifested the sounds of the Vedas, and did not actually create the Vedas. The Vedic word was, thus, divine, eternal and hence infallible as a guiding force. But, while upholding the timelessness of the Vedas as sabda, Jaimini refused to acknowledge any coeternal spirit, uttering or revealing the word. The word was self-sufficient and did not derive its meaning or authority from any other source. "This absurd idea," wrote Stcherbatsky, "assailed by all other orthodox and unorthodox schools the Mimamsakas defended by arguments and sophisms of extraordinary dialectical subtlety. It apparently exhausted all their speculative wits, for in all other problems they maintained the most decidedly realistic, anti-metaphysical, negative position."

According to Max Muller, Jaimini did not mention God because he wanted to defend God from attacks: "Jaimini would not make the Lord responsible for the injustice that seems to prevail in the world and reduced everything to cause and effect, and saw in the inequalities of the world the natural result of the continued action of good or evil acts. This surely was not atheism; rather it was an attempt to clear the Lord of those charges of cruelty or undue partiality which have so often been brought against Him. If the Mimamsakas were called atheists, it meant no more than that they tried to justify the ways of God in their own way."[1]

This argument seems to be untenable, especially because

[1]Max Muller: *Collected Works*, Vol. XIX, pp. 211-12.

Max Muller himself admits that, at least in its original form, the Mimamsa was a philosophy which did not believe in a supreme being as the creator. According to it, the world and the Vedas had existed for all time. As Stcherbatsky put it, the Mimamsa recognised "no God creator, no omniscient being, no saints, no mysticism, whatsoever; the world as it appears to our senses and nothing more. Therefore, no innate ideas, no constructive cognition, no images, no introspection, a bare consciousness, a *tabula rasa* of sensitivity and memory, which registers and preserves all external experiences."[2]

The world, according to the Mimamsakas, had come into being as the result of the laws of Karma, and its material foundations were eternal. Like the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, the Mimamsa, too, firmly believed in the eternality of substances (dravyas). If no God existed, how was it that the world evolved and developed out of matter? The Mimamsa answered, thus: Every effect has a cause. Every karma has its own fruit. Everything has a force inherent in it. It is this force that produces the effect or result. If this force is destroyed, the effect does not materialise. For example, take a seed. There is an inviolable force within it due to the functions of which the seed sprouts. If the force is destroyed, say, by roasting the seed, it does not sprout any longer.

But, this was only one side of the picture. Though Jaimini did not believe in God as the creator of the universe, he spoke about an unforeseen and mysterious force called apurva. This apurva literally meant something that did not exist before and, therefore, something new. Acts were enjoined with a view to their results. Between an act and its result, there was inevitably some delay. In this interval, the result existed in the form of apurva, an unforeseen force. In other words, the deferred fruition of an act was achieved through apurva. Jaimini says: "There is apurva because action (is enjoined)." Here we find one of the significant elements of idealism and mysticism in the Mimamsa philosophy.

The Mimamsa did not deny the existence of the soul. But,

[2]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, p. 23.

though eternal, the soul was not detached from matter or free from activity (karma). The soul and body formed a unit, and that was man. Man was dynamic by nature. But, the soul functioned under certain limitations, the first being the physical body itself. Physical body was considered to be the source of all the pains and pleasures that the soul experienced. Secondly, there were the sensory and other organs through which the soul entered into relations with the outside world. Thirdly, there was the external world itself, the basis of the living experiences of all individuals. The Mimamsa explained in this way the relation of man with the external world.

But the soul, according to Mimamsa, was not an unchanging, static concept. It underwent changes, just as the external world did. The world, too, was looked upon as a dynamic reality.

The acquirement of real knowledge about the world and the soul was quite possible. The early Mimamsa philosophers had recognised perception and inference, besides revelation through the sabda (authority of the Vedas), as sources of knowledge. Subsequently, three more sources were added: *viz.* arthapatthi (postulation or supposition, by which an apparent inconsistency is explained); sambhava (possibility) and abhava or anupalabdha (non-being or non-perception). Postulation or arthapatthi meant the supposition of an unperceived fact in order to explain some contradictory phenomena. For instance, if somebody said that a person did not eat during the day, and, yet, he was fat and healthy, it must mean that he ate at night. In the statement that there were no pots in the world, the non-being (abhava) of pots was brought out. If a thousand things were mentioned, it was possible that at least a hundred were real. This was an example of sambhava (possibility). The Mimamsa dealt with these and similar processes of logical reasoning in an elaborate manner, but this often led them away into religious or idealist abstraction, for, the recognition of the external world was related to the eternality of the Vedas and the creative power of ritualism.

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya draws a distinction between godless ritualism and ritualism related to gods. According to the Mimamsakas, rituals by themselves (by their inherent potency) produced the desired results. No god was propitiated by sacrifices

and the rewards were not awarded by any god. Debiprasad, therefore, regards the Mimamsakas "as champions of the pre-spiritualistic assumption underlying primitive magic."[3] According to him, "the fundamental assumption of primitive magic is not only opposed to spiritualism, but also to philosophic idealism."[4] Hence, he observes, "the Mimamsa stood for stark atheism and a thorough rejection of philosophic idealism."[5]

It is true that the Mimamsakas did not recognise the existence of God or any other spiritual agent in the operations of yajnas, but they believed in heaven! Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra explicitly stated that the object of sacrifice was to secure heaven: "Let one desirous of heaven perform a sacrifice."[6]

Jaimini stoutly justified Vedic sacrifices. But sacrifices, for him, were only a means to the attainment of heaven (in another world). He, therefore, had to insist on faith in heaven also. Liberation or moksha was considered to be a new life in this other-worldly heaven, not the release from pain in this earthly life as some other systems proclaimed. Perhaps it was a godless heaven!

Again, it is true that they ridiculed the worship of Vedic deities. They defended with all their might the validity of the Vedas themselves and raised the Vedic yajna, which was originally the simple sympathetic magic of early Aryans, to the highest level of priestly ritualism. The early Aryans, no doubt, considered that sacrifices were nothing but the means to propitiate deities like Agni, Vayu, Varuna and Mitra, and the entire people had the right to perform them. Under the Mimamsakas, however, the sudras were excluded from the performance of sacrificial ceremonies.

The Mimamsakas upheld the brahmin supremacy in the Varnasrama system and justified slavery in unmistakable terms. To them, sudras were an inferior, despicable class. Jaimini was opposed to the view that there must be no distinction among the four varnas, at least, in regard to yajnas or sacrifices. The following passage from Jainimi's Mimamsa Sutra is revealing: "Topic:

[3]Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya: *Indian Philosophy*, pp. 56-57.
[4]*Ibid.*
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 24.
[6]Jamini's *Mimamsa Sutra*, Ch. I., p. 1.

The sudra is not entitled to the performance of sacrifices (VI. I. 25). Objection: All the four castes are entitled to the performance of sacrifices, there being no distinction (VI.I. 26). True view: In reality, the acts in question can be performed by the three (higher) castes only, as, in connection with the installation of fire, these three only have been mentioned: (the sudra) therefore, can have no connection with sacrifices, the Veda being applicable to the brahmin (and the other two castes) only—such is the opinion of Atreya."[7]

Pandit Mohanlal Sandal in his introduction to the translation of the Mimamsa Sutra of Jaimini explains this as follows: "A sudra is not entitled to wear a sacred thread; he is, therefore, not entitled to perform the sacrifice. Further, there is a Vedic text under which only the three higher castes (Varnas) are entitled to establish fire; from this fact, it appears that a sudra is not given the privilege of performing the sacrifices."[8]

Even if a sudra was allowed the privilege, he would not have the wherewithal to perform it, for the descriptions of the various yajnas in the Mimamsa Sutra make it clear that they were so costly that only very rich people could afford to indulge in them.

Thus, whatever the origins of ritualism, the Mimamsa had nothing to do with the popular primitive magic of the pre-class society or even the simple rituals of the early Vedic Aryans.

As already mentioned, the Mimamsa philosophy, from the very beginning, developed as an ally of the Uttara Mimamsa or the Vedanta system. There was no contradiction between the two systems. Both the early Mimamsa and the early Vedanta considered the Vedas as authoritative and recognised the reality of the external world. Some thinkers even regarded both as a single system. A pre-Sankara Vedantin, Mandana Misra, for instance, advocated the combination of the karma of the Mimamsa and the jnana of the Vedanta. "As a matter of fact," observes Kunhan Raja, "practically all the exponents of the Mimamsa system were also celebrated scholars in the Vedanta and writers in that field."[9]

In short, the Mimamsa philosophy is essentially idealist in

[7] *Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra*, VI. 1, 25-26.

[8] *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXVIII, p-Cvi., Allahabad 1925.

[9] C. Kunhan Raja: *Some Fundamental Problems in Indian Philosophy*, p. 246.

content. In course of time, even the atheistic aspects of their doctrine receded into the background, and the theory of the infallibility of the Vedas and of the absolute sanctity of the eternal articulate sounds, combined with a blind faith in rituals and ceremonies, became the be-all and end-all of the Mimamsa system.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE EARLY VEDANTA

"VEDANTA" literally means the concluding portion of the Vedas. This system was so named because it was based on the Upanishads, which were regarded sometimes as the grand finale of the Vedas. But, as we have seen, the Upanishads did not enunciate any consistent philosophic thought. They contained both materialist and idealist trends, and were in many places self-contradictory.

This difficulty was sought to be overcome by Badarayana, who is supposed to have founded the Vedanta. He is dated somewhere between the fourth century B.C. and the second century A.D. Some writers identify him with the legendary Vyasa who is credited with having compiled the Vedas and the Mahabharata in their present forms. ("Vyasa" literally means the arranger and "Veda Vyasa," the arranger or compiler of the Vedas.) Perhaps, Vedavyasa was another name of Badarayana. Anyway, it was this Badarayana who is believed to have brought together a harmonious and unified system of idealist philosophy out of the maze of thoughts in the Upanishads.

We know from the Buddhist and Jaina texts that Vedanta as a philosophy existed as early as the seventh or sixth century B.C. and that, according to it, consciousness or soul was the primary cause of everything and to which everything returned. We also know that this philosophical view was combated by the materialists on the one hand, and the Buddhists and Jainas on the other. A few centuries must have passed before this simple idealist view was elaborated and systematised into the Brahma Sutra or Vedanta Sutra containing about 560 aphorisms. The whole work was divided into four sections. The first called Samanvaya attempted a coherent interpretation of the varying and contradictory texts of the Upanishads and dealt with the Brahman or the Absolute and its relationship with the world and human life. The second section tried to prove that the interpretation given in the first section was consistent with the teachings of traditional sages. The third dealt with

Brahmavidya, the way to realise the Brahman, and the fourth with the immortal atman or soul, and the results of the knowledge of the Brahman.

The main question posed by the Brahma Sutra is: "What is the the primal cause of motion in nature?" And the answer is: "Brahman, the ultimate principle." The Vedanta founded by Badarayana was an enquiry into the nature of the ultimate principle or Brahman. The object of his whole system is stated in the very first sutra: *Athatho Brahmajijnasa* (now, therefore, the desire to know Brahman).

The Vedanta held that "inert matter becomes active only when there is the directive action of intelligence in it."[1] The primal cause was, therefore, nothing but Brahman, the Supreme Intelligence. The Sutra defined the Brahman as, "*janmady asya yatah*," "that from which the origin, etc. (*i.e.* subsistence and destruction) of this (would proceed)."[2] The relevant text of this sutra was the passage in the Taittiriya Upanishad which says: "That from which these beings are born, that by which when born they live, that into which when departing they enter. That, seek to know. That is Brahman."

After this definition, Badarayana proceeded to suggest by various arguments that the cause of the world was conscious Reality and that it could not be identified with the non-conscious pradhana or unevolved matter as the Samkhya system held. Brahman was the conscious intelligent principle. He dwelt deep in all existence. He encompassed and regulated the whole universe. He was the infinite consciousness permeating all space and manifesting himself in all things. The human soul, according to the Vedanta, was active, and not passive as the Samkhya suggested. It was a part of Brahman as the spark was of fire. The Supreme Being was omniscient, omnipotent, blissful. He was the light, the very breath of life (prana). He was the creator and the creation. He was Existence, Bliss Absolute, Knowledge (Sat-chid-ananda), without beginning or end. He was without parts, without form (nirakara), without qualities (nirguna), without action, unblemished, unstained.

[1] *Brahma Sutra*, II, ii. 2.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, i. 2.

"He is eternal, omniscient, pervader of all things, ever satisfied in nature, ever pure, intelligent and free. He is wisdom and delight."

This, in the words of Monier Williams who translated the Brahma Sutra into English, "is purely almost tantamount to asserting that pure Being is identical with pure Nothing, so that the two extremes of Buddhistic nihilism and Vedantic pantheism...appear in the end to meet."[3] The principal tenet of the Brahma Sutra was that Brahman was the material and efficient cause of the universe. Badarayana explained how the existing knowledge itself conceded the reality of Brahman and declared that the entire world was the creation of Brahman. Brahman acted on its own will and volition. All the causes and effects of the universe were manifestations of this will. The evils and unhappiness found in life did not negate the blissful nature of Brahman. Joy, and not sorrow, was the essence of creation. The final goal for everyone was the same, for, Brahman was the radiant vitality that stirred in the hearts of all men.

"In the early prose Upanishads," writes Radhakrishnan, "atman is the principle of the individual consciousness, and Brahman the super-personal ground of the cosmos. Soon, the distinction diminishes, and the two are identified. God is not merely the transcendent numinous other, but is also the universal spirit which is the basis of human personality and its ever-renewing vitalising power. Brahman, the first principle of the universe, is known through atman, the inner self of man."[4]

The Brahma Sutra emphasised the Upanishadic view that the atman was the Supreme Soul itself and that this universe arose out of the same substance as Brahman. Hence Brahman was called both the material (or substantial) and efficient cause of the universe, which it produced out of itself just as a spider spins its web from its own substance. According to Badarayana, the objects created and the creator were identical. "Brahman is also prakriti"[5] (the substance of the world). Because of action related to itself, it changed its form and became the universe. This modification of Brahman

[3]Monier Williams: *Indian Wisdom*, p. 116.

[4]S. Radhakrishnan: *The Principal Upanishads*, p. 77.

[5]*Brahma Sutra*, I, 4. 23.

into material elements was mentioned in the Upanishads also: "It became the elements—gross (earth, water, fire) and subtle (air, space)" etc. Svetasvatara Upanishad says: "The one deity remains hidden in all beings. He is all-pervasive, the in-dwelling self of all, the regulator of all actions and support of all beings, the witness, consciousness, non-dual, and without qualities."[6] But, if the Brahman was prakriti, or the substance of the universe, if the external world was identical with the Supreme Self, then it must also mean that there could not be any consciousness over and above the world, and that matter and spirit—Brahman and prakriti—were both identical and real. Badarayana's Vedanta, thus, recognised the reality of the world and did not deny it utterly, as did some of the later Vedantists who advocated the doctrine of Maya (illusion) and Mithya (fiction). We shall deal with this later Vedanta of the feudal era in a subsequent chapter. Suffice it to say for the present that the Vedanta of the original Brahma Sutra had not wandered so much into the abstract, denying the world reality altogether, as some of its interpreters did later on. "The notion that the versatile world is an illusion (maya), that all which passes to the apprehension of the waking individual is but a phantasy, presented to his imagination, and that every sensible thing is unreal and all is visionary, does not appear to be the doctrine of the text of the Vedanta." (Colebrooke)

The Brahma Sutra must have been composed precisely to combat the views of the materialist philosophers like Kanada and Kapila, and of the rationalists like the Buddha and Mahavira. Nevertheless, the Vedantic idealism of this early period could not check the spread of materialist and rationalist ideas among the people. According to the materialist doctrines of the Samkhya, the Vaiseshika and the Nyaya, matter was the primary reality, and ideas, consciousness, etc. were derivative. The material universe and laws of nature existed independently of human consciousness. According to the Samkhya, as we have seen, the world was the result of the transformation of pradhana or prakriti beyond which "there exists no external principle which could either impel the pradhana

[6] *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, vi, 12.

to activity or restrain it from activity." Similarly, the Vaiseshika held that the world was caused by the combination of the minutest particles of matter called atoms. But, the Vedanta view was that spirit was primary, and matter secondary or derivative.

The Vedanta rejected all theories and systems which explained the world either as the product of material elements that combined by themselves to form the various objects, or as the transformation of the unconscious primal nature (prakriti) possessing the three gunas, from which the world spontaneously evolved without being spurred by any conscious spirit. The Samkhya philosophers had argued that, just as non-sentient milk flowed from the cow's udder spontaneously for the nourishment of the young calf, the non-sentient prakriti became active by its own nature; and that, just as grass, herbs, water, etc. changed into milk and other substances, so prakriti also transformed itself independently of any other instrumental cause. To these arguments, the Brahma Sutra answer was that no motion could take place without the help of an intelligent agency. "Nor can it be said that prakriti modifies itself spontaneously like grass, etc. (which turn into milk); for, milk does not exist elsewhere (but in the female animal). The intelligent agency which dwells deep in all existences and regulates the universe is the omnipotent, omniscient and sentient Brahman."

The Vedanta was an idealist quest to solve the supreme mystery that was supposed to underlie the world of man's sense-experience. This knowledge of the Supreme Reality behind the world of appearances was regarded as the highest knowledge, through which alone man could attain salvation, moksha. The Vedanta proclaimed that all those who realised Brahman "became of the nature of the self-luminous Reality, intelligent, blissful, without body, sense organs, vital airs and mind," and that "in whatever form they meditate on Him, that they become themselves." Being Brahman themselves, they attain Brahman.

Many idealist scholars have claimed that the teachings of the Brahma Sutra and the Upanishads were essentially the same. But, as mentioned already, the Upanishads contained many inconsistent concepts, both idealist and materialist. Badarayana's attempt was not to reconcile these contradictions, but to evolve a coherent

philosophy out of the scattered idealistic trends in the Upanishads. His Brahma Sutra was, as Albert Schweitzer rightly said, "only the starting point of Brahminic scholasticism." It was the flowering of this scholasticism that came later to be associated with the famous names of Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and others.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

THE Bhagavad Gita, one of the most popular poetic expositions of philosophy in ancient India, is a part of the great epic, Mahabharata. It is a clarion call for bold human action in life, given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, the Pandava hero, who was appalled by the horrors of war and the slaughter he had to commit of his kith and kin in the battle of Kurukshetra.

The Mahabharata contains various episodes which suggest that though it might have been compiled and edited in its present form at some time between the third century B.C. and the second century A.D. (Garbe suggests that it was written in the second century B.C. and was adapted with necessary changes by the upholders of idealist monism in the second century A.D.), its roots lay in a much earlier period, when the tribal society of the Aryans, based on bonds of kinship, was giving way to the Varnasrama system, with its emphasis on division of labour among the four classes and duty by one's own class. The Bhagavad Gita, with its eighteen chapters, is Krishna's long philosophical discourse to the doubt-stricken Arjuna. Arjuna's moral compunction when confronted on the battle field with his task as a Kshatriya of killing his enemies who happened to be his own kinsmen—"uncles and grand-uncles, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers and cousins, sons and grandsons, friends, fathers-in-law and well-wishers"[1]—represented the age-old loyalty to the ties of consanguinity and kuladharma; whereas Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna to perform his class duty (svadharma), regardless of all qualms of conscience, represented the rising strength of new historical trends. While Arjuna felt that violation of kuladharma was the worst of sins, Krishna was emphatic that there was nothing greater than loyalty to svadharma and "nothing more propitious for a man of the warrior class (kshatriya) than a righteous war."[2] "Even death in

[1] *The Bhagavad Gita*, I. pp. 26-27.

[2] *Ibid.*, II. p. 31.

the performance of one's own duty brings blessedness; another's duty is fraught with fear."[3] All the different philosophical strands in the Gita tend to highlight this need for action in terms of one's duty (dharma) in the world.

The Supreme Lord was supposed to be beyond all actions. He was a non-doer; yet, He was invoked to sanctify the class divisions in society. "Chathurvarnya or the four orders of society," declared Lord Krishna, "were created by me classifying them according to their gunas and karma."[4] One should not absolve oneself from the obligations consequent on one's birth, even if it involved violence or unpleasant tasks. The duty of the kshatriya was to fight while that of the sudra was to serve the brahmin and the kshatriya.

As we have noted earlier, the system of Chathurvarnya was a step forward from the classless, primitive, tribal society. This historical urge that moved society forward from brarbarism to civilisation was idealised by the Gita as the Supreme Lord Himself. Perhaps, such an extreme claim was necessary because the transition from a primitive classless society to a class society and the consolidation of the Varnasrama system had to contend against powerful opposition accompanied by great philosophical activity.

The intellectual ferment that followed the age of the Upanishads challenged not only the theistic and idealist outlooks, but also the very foundation that gave birth to idealism. Materialistic ideas were accompanied by the denigration of brahmin oligarchy and the Varnasrama system of society. The ruling classes took the widespread discontent into account and endeavoured to maintain the existing social order with the help of religious doctrines demanding an unshakable faith in God. It appears that one of the chief aims of the Gita was to counteract the heterodox "demoniacal" people who held that there was no God and that the world was brought about by the union of man and woman.[5] "The religious systems that had sprung up," wrote Bhandarkar, "were mostly atheistic. The Indian mind had become prone to indulge in

[3] *Ibid.*, III. p. 35.
[4] *Ibid.*, IV. p. 13
[5] *Ibid.*, XVI. p. 8.

mere moral discourses and thoughts on moral exaltation, unassociated with a theistic faith as appears clear from Buddhism and other systems, and also very dry moral dissertations of which the Mahabharata is full. Such a system as that of the Bhagavad Gita was, therefore, necessary to counteract those tendencies. Theistic ideas were so scattered in the Upanishads that it was necessary for practical purposes to work them up in a system of redemption capable of being grasped easily. These appeared to be the conditions under which Gita came into existence."[6]

It must, however, be noted that the idealism in the Bhagavad Gita, though unscientific and onesided, was not based on escapism or mere shunning of the world, but on boldly facing the problems of life. It did not uphold superstitious rituals or passivity of any kind. "No man," says Krishna to Arjuna, "can reach perfection by simply shunning the world." Not renunciation of action, but disinterested action leads one to happiness. "Freed from attachment, unegoistic, endowed with firmness and vigour and unaffected by success or failure, such a man of action is said to be satvika or of the most excellent type."[7]

This theory of disinterested karma has been used by the ruling classes to maintain the existing social order, as well as by the progressive sections of society in their fight for a new social order.

All sorts of vices and evil qualities like hypocrisy, arrogance, anger, insatiable passion, harshness and ignorance are attributed by the Gita to the atheist. Krishna exhorts Arjuna to root out such vices and cultivate divine qualities like non-violence, truthfulness, equanimity, etc. The Gita links such personal qualities with the moral requirements and ethical laws of society. And it must be admitted that the ethical ideas of the Bhagavad Gita have helped many of our people to build their personality. In his study on the Gita, Mahatma Gandhi defined a perfect Karmayogi as follows:

> "He is a devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike

[6] R. G. Bhandarkar: *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems.*
[7] *The Bhagavad Gita,* XVIII. p. 26.

cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated his mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action, yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruits, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments."

The Gita did not enunciate any new doctrine or any new school of philosophical thought. It was rather an attempt to synthesise the different contradictory views that prevailed at the time into a single philosophical testament. The influence of diverse contemporaneous thoughts can, therefore, be observed in its composition. The Vedanta doctrines as well as the Samkhya concepts, the theory of karma (action) as well as jnana (knowledge), bhakti (devotion), as well as sannyasa (renunciation)—all were pressed into service by Krishna to resolve Arjuna's doubts. But, the Samkhya was given pride of place. While holding up Bhrigu as the greatest rishi (sage), the Gita declared Kapila to be the most outstanding siddha (seer). Elaborating Kapila's Samkhya, it said that "prakriti (primordial matter) and purusha (sentient principle) are both without a beginning"; but then, it added, "let it be known that all qualities and modifications of matter are born of prakriti."[8] According to the Samkhya, prakriti was composed of the three fundamental qualities of satva, rajas and tamas. These gunas did not exist independently of prakriti. Prakriti was the starting point of cause and effect. It was necessary to learn to differentiate the soul from the body and the body from the soul. "All actions are being done by the modes of primordial matter. The fool, by egoism, considers himself to be the doer." "All beings follow their own nature; even the wise man behaves in conformity

[8] *Ibid.*, XIII. p. 19.

with his nature."[9] The Gita proclaimed that all beings evolved out of prakriti which was twofold—insentient as well as sentient. Earth, water, fire, ether, mind (manas), reason (buddhi) and ego (ahamkara) were of the lower or insentient prakriti, while jiva (the life principle) was sentient. "There is no existence here on earth, in the heavens or among the celestial or anywhere else, which is free from these three qualities born of matter."[10] On the whole, there were 24 tatvas (principles) in the evolution of prakriti. The primordial matter, mahabhutas, or the five subtle elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth), ahamkara (ego), buddhi (intellect), the ten organs of knowledge and action; the mind, the five indriyagocharas or sense objects (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell), desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, consciousness and resolution—this was the kshetra or prakriti, with its evolutes." Thus, intelligence, mind and senses evolved out of the body. Matter was said to be the root cause of the body and the senses, while purusha or spirit caused the experience of pleasure and pain. Purusha enjoyed the objects of nature and experienced the three gunas (qualities) inherent in it, only when seated in matter.[11] Thus, "all beings, animate and inanimate, have emanated from the union of kshetra (matter) and kshetrajna (spirit)."

According to the Gita, there was no essential difference between the Samkhya and the Yoga systems except that the latter prescribed a detailed sadhana of mental and physical discipline. And it interrelated the speculative philosophy of the Samkhya with the system of yogic practice in order to emphasise the need for action in life.

"The ignorant consider Samkhya and Yoga to be divergent, but not the wise. He who properly follows the guidance contained in one realises the effect of both. Only those who realise that Samkhya and Yoga are the same understand correctly."

Pointing out the elaborate references to the Samkhya and the Yoga in the Gita, Richard Garbe wrote as follows:

[9] *Ibid.*, III. pp. 27, 33.
[10] *Ibid.*, VII. p. 6.
[11] *Ibid.*, XVIII. p. 40.

"The teachings of the Sankhya-Yoga constitute almost entirely the foundation of the philosophical observations of the Bhagavad Gita. In comparison with them, the Vedanta takes a second place. Sankhya and Yoga are often mentioned by name, while the Vedanta appears only once (in XV.25) and then in the sense of Upanishadic treatise. Accordingly, when we think merely of the role which the philosophical systems play in the Gita as it has been handed down to us, and when we consi-, der the irreconcilable contradictions between the Sankhya-Yoga and the Vedanta which can only be done away with by carefully distinguishing between the old and the new, the Vedantic constituents of the Bhagavad Gita prove not to belong to the original poem. Whether we investigate the Gita from the religious or the philosophical side, the same result is reached."

This is not to say that the Gita presents in the main a materialist philosophy; far from it. It is true that the Samkhya figures prominently in more than one chapter of the Gita and its founder Kapila is given an honoured place. But, the Samkhya philosophy in the hands of the Gita compilers was given an idealistic twist. While in one place it admits that matter is eternal and without a beginning and that all beings have evolved out of prakriti, in another place it says that Lord Krishna or the Supreme Soul is the source of the entire creation (VII.6). On the one hand, it recognises the independent character of the forces of eternal matter, but, on the other, it revives the primitive animistic belief in the existence of a soul divorced from any material vehicle. According to the Gita, matter is subject to changes and modifications, but the soul is immutable, imperishable, eternal and free from birth and decay (II.21). "Weapons cannot cut it, nor can fire burn it, water cannot drench it, nor can wind make it dry" (II.23). "The soul is never born nor dies; nor does it exist on coming into being. For, it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval; even though the body is slain, the soul is not" (II.20). Yet, such a soul is bound by the law of karma to the world of matter. In one place, the Gita holds that "all beings were unmanifest (avyakta) before they were born, and will become unmanifest again when they are dead; are

manifest only in the intermediate stage" (II.28). Which means that all animate and inanimate beings are the manifestations of the avyakta or primordial nature. But, in another place, it states that both the sentient and the insentient world, both purusha and prakriti, are the manifestations of the Paramatma, Super Soul. Prakriti or the unmanifested primordial matter is the womb of all creation; in that the Supreme Lord places the seed (of consciousness). The birth of all beings follows this combination of matter and spirit. Of all the bodies that take birth from different wombs, this primodial matter is the mother and the Supreme Lord the procreating father (XIV.3.4). In one place, the Gita says simply that all animate and inanimate beings have sprung up from the union of kshetra (matter) and kshetrajna (spirit) (XIII.26). But, elsewhere it declares that all beings have their origin in the Supreme Lord (XVIII.46). And there is also an assertion that the Supreme Being operates only through the laws of nature. It was precisely such heterogeneous and mutually incompatible ideas in the Bhagavad Gita that made it capable of being diversely interpreted by different philosophers.

Krishna, it would appear, had no objection to people holding diverse philosophical views. Whatever the views one held, one would attain liberation by worshipping the Lord with faith. But, even with regard to worship and prayer, the outlook of the Gita was not rigid or sectarian. Krishna declared that even those who did not worship him but who worshipped other deities with sincerity and devotion, actually, worshipped him. He said: "I am equally present in all beings; there is none hateful or dear to me" (IX.20). Therefore, not only brahmins and kshatriyas but womenfolk, "vaisyas, sudras and even those that are born of the womb of sin taking refuge in me, they too attain the supreme goal" (IX.32).

The ethics of the Gita arose directly from its liberal philosophical outlook: One's own soul was really identical with the souls of all other beings and, therefore, one who injured others actually injured himself. "For, beholding the same Lord (the universal soul) residing in all beings, a man does not harm himself (his own self in others) by himself, so he goes to the final goal." This idea

was considered as specially important in its bearing on social behaviour; for, it meant that all human beings—from the brahmin to the chandala—were equal before the Lord and, therefore, one who was devoted to the Lord must treat all men alike.

The Bhagavad Gita did not present itself merely as an abstract speculative system of philosophy seeking the origin of the universe; for, it blended in itself the attributes of the Upanishadic Absolute and those of a monotheistic supreme deity in human form which could be approached, apprehended, and appealed to for one's own salvation. It was, thus, one of the earliest attempts of Indian thinkers to merge philosophy into religion.

The Gita suggested different ways to the supreme goal—the path of action (karma marga), the path of knowledge (jnana marga) and the path of devotion (bhakti marga). All these margas were declared to be equally fruitful. Some philosophers like Sankara, for example, upheld the path of knowledge; others like Ramanuja and Ramananda stressed the path of devotion; and still others like Tilak and Gandhi followed the path of action. We shall see in the next part of this book how the Bhakti movement launched by Ramananda shook the foundations of feudalism towards the end of the Middle Ages. We shall also see how the Gita became a powerful weapon in the hands of progressive national leaders like Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi in their fight against British Imperialism. Thus, the Gita which, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, was "a bouquet composed of the beautiful flowers of the spiritual truths collected from the Upanishads," lived unfaded through the centuries and exercised a powerful influence not only on the religious leaders and social reformers of the medieval period, but also on the political leaders of the modern era.

PART III

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

FEUDALISM IN INDIA

THE age of the imperial Guptas, which began with the ascension of the first of the Gupta kings, Chandra Gupta, to the throne of Magadha in A.D. 320, stands out in the economic and cultural history of India, because it was in this period that the first elements of feudal ownership in landed property, in their incipient form, made their appearance in India. It demarcates the beginning of the Middle Ages and the end of the ancient period in Indian history.

The collapse of the Gupta empire (about A. D. 500) and the social and political turmoil unleashed by the inroads of the Huns were followed by tremendous philosophical and religious changes in India. The basic cause of these changes was the deepening crisis within the Varna system of slavery and the emergence of new productive forces. The growth of productive forces had reached a stage when slave labour was found inadequate and disadvantageous because the slaves lacked any incentive to increase production for their masters. The Varnasrama system of slavery, therefore, gave place to a historically more progressive system of production: "Feudalism."

It was when such far-reaching changes in the economic and social fields were taking place that Emperor Harsha (A. D. 606-647) established his feudal kingdom at Kanauj and rapidly expanded his territory from the Punjab to the Bay of Bengal. This period also saw the rise of other famous kingdoms like the Palas in Bengal, the Chandels in Bundelkhand, the Abhiras in Gujarat and the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Pallavas, Cheras and Cholas in the South. In the seventh century A.D., there were more than 70 independent feudal kingdoms in India.

European authors have often defined Feudalism as an economic system in which serfdom played the predominant role in production. Serfdom implied non-economic compulsion, and it presupposed that peasants worked both on their own land and on the manorial estate of the lord. It was in this sense that Maurice

Dobb described Western European Feudalism as being "virtually identical with what we usually mean by serfdom."[1] This definition, however, is not applicable to India, where serfdom with its forced labour and labour rent, has never been the dominant form of social relations. The West European serf had to perform unpaid, compulsory labour on the lord's manor, in return for which he was allowed a small plot of land where he could build his hut and raise some crop. The Indian peasant under feudalism was under no such obligation. It is true that in the last stages of feudalism there were instances of landlords forcing their serfs to work on their estates; yet, the West European system of compulsory serf-labour did not develop as an integral part of the feudal mode of production in India.

Of course, the basic feature of feudalism in India was not unlike its counterpart in other parts of the world. Land, the basic means of production, was the property of the feudal lord; the owners of the means of production appropriated for their own use the surplus produced by the peasant masses. In the words of Marx, "the specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of the ruler and the ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and in turn reacts upon it as a determining element."[2] But, a mechanical application of this statement would not help one understand the concrete form of feudalism prevalent in any country; for, as Marx himself has pointed out, "this does not prevent the same economic basis—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances."[3]

India is a vast country. It is not, therefore, surprising that the forms of feudal relations differed from area to area. Still, there were some common characteristics which marked Indian feudalism—the age-old village communities, the interlinking of agriculture

[1] Maurice Dobb: *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, p. 35.
[2] Marx: *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 772.
[3] *Ibid.*

with handicrafts, the continuance of tribal ties of kinship, development of the caste system and untouchability, all this existing side by side with the surviving traces of slavery and even primitive communism. Elements of feudalism in India emerged within the structure of the Varnasrama system itself without destroying it completely, and were for a long time intertwined with slave relations, just as the survivals of primitive communism had continued to eixst formerly under the Varnasrama system. Such a picture of the old living within the new, without being totally obliterated, is quite in keeping with India's historic tradition which continues to the present day. In certain areas, people who were still in the tribal communist stage were influenced by the feudal states developing in the neighbouring territories and passed directly into feudalism without knowing anything about the Varnasrama system. In such areas, the tribal ties of kinship and totemism were stronger than in other areas. The crisis of the slave owing system was not so deep and its disintegration not so rapid in India as it was in Europe. Feudalism developed slowly in this country and was not accompanied by violent social upheavals and class conflagrations.

Another characteristic of Indian feudalism was that collective ownership of land, inherited from the earliest times, continued to coexist with it, although in a formal sense. But, side by side with common ownership, private possession also remained; for, from time to time, land under common ownership used to be allotted to individual joint families for cultivation. Sometimes, new settlers appeared on the scene and, with the permission of the village community, occupied waste lands or forests and by hard work made them fit for cultivation. This also led to new economic and social developments. Although land was originally allotted to individuals only for their life time, the position changed in course of time. Possession of land by inheritance became fairly common. When the head of a family died, it became customary to divide his possessions among his descendants.

Farming out of the land to the actual tillers was done even under the Mauryas. Kautilya recommended that "lands prepared for cultivation shall be given to tax payers only for life," and that "lands may be confiscated from those who do not cultivate them

and given to others."[4] Sukranitisara, a work assigned to the sixth or seventh century A. D., enjoined that "the king should not give up even an inch (angula) of land in such a way as to part with his rights to it; he may, however, give away (to persons) for their maintenance, but so long as the receiver lives." Sukraniti also recommended: "The king should give to each cultivator the deed of rent (assessement) having his own seal. Having determined the land revenue of the village, the king should receive it from one rich man in advance, or a guarantee (for the payment) of that, either by monthly or periodical instalments. Or the king should appoint officers called gramapa, by paying 1/16, 1/12, 1/8, or 1/6 of his own receipts."[5]

The gramapas, or village headmen, appointed by the king, exercised full authority in the village in the name of the king. They leased out the lands to the peasants and received a share of the produce. Out of this share, they paid a portion to the king, keeping the remainder for themselves. In this manner, they filled their own granaries and waxed rich, becoming, in effect, landlords. The change came about slowly, but this was one of the forms in which feudal landlordism raised its head in India.

Revenues were collected and the administrative machinery was run by various officials appointed by the king. Belonging exclusively to the higher castes, they enjoyed many privileges; sometimes, land was specially apportioned to them. The Chinese traveller, Heun Tsang, who visited Harsha's India in the seventh century A. D., recorded that "the governors, ministers, magistrates and officials have each a portion of land consigned to them for their personal support." Even some of those who had control over common land managed in course of time to become virtually their owners. Thus, slowly but steadily, a rural upper class emerged from the village communities.

The existence of a large number of vassal kings and local chieftains, recognising the suzerainty of and paying tributes to the emperor, was a feature of the Mauryan and Guptan political structures. These small kings and chieftains exercised a great deal of

[4] *Kautilya's Arthasastra*, II. 1-47.

[5] *Sukraniti*: Sarkar's Translation, IV-2, pp. 245-46.

authority in their own principalities with no fear of interference by the emperor.

Some of the feudal lords and rural chieftains, who appropriated the commonly owned lands to themsleves, leased out the lands for a share of the produce and paid a portion of their income to the vassal lords. The kings in general received their tribute from the lords and the vassals. Nevertheless, the landlords and the vassals who rendered military and other assistance to the king were often exempted from payment of tributes, which meant that the local chieftains were practically left in full possession of political and governmental power. Paramountcy was nominal. This kind of political system, with the corresponding pattern of productive relations of the feudal type, prevailed for a long period.

Yet another feature of Indian feudalism was that land was sometimes donated to the temples often controlled by brahmin priests who inevitably grabbed them for their own benefit. Occasionally, land grants were directly made to the brahmins as a reward for religious services, and for the spiritual uplift of the donor. Sarma quotes the instance of a grant made by the Vakataka ruler, Pravarasena II, which clearly laid down that the thousand brahmins to whom a village was granted could hold it only on condition that "they commit no treason against the kingdom, do not slay brahmanas, do not commit theft and adultery, do not poison kings, do not wage wars, and do not wrong other villages."[6]

Fa-Hian, the Chinese pilgrim (fourth century A.D.), observed that fields and gardens and cattle were granted to monasteries, with husbandmen to look after them. Such grants to individuals and religious institutions, which began on a minor scale in the Gupta period, increased considerably in the later stages of feudalism. These grants did not mean an actual conferring of ownership; they meant only the rights of possession and use, and the right to collect revenues. But, they paved the way for the emergence of a new priestly class who, in the name of God and religion, exercised feudal rights over vast areas.

Besides feudal landholding and communal landholding, the state

[6]R. S. Sarma: *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 204.

also was in the picture as a landholder in its own right. In fact, the rajahs were the biggest landowners. Indian feudalism was, thus, a highly complex structure, incorporating various patterns of relations. At the top of this was the king, then came the vassals and feudal chiefs, and below them other landlords. At the lowest level were the tillers of the soil. The relationship between the feudal lords and the cultivating peasants took many forms. In some communities, a fixed share of the produce was directly paid to the king; in certain other communities, the intermediary feudal lord received the rent; while, in some places, the peasants took the lands on lease from the lords for certain fixed periods. Independent peasants owning private property were also not unknown. But, it has to be noted that, in spite of these transformations in the economic and political structure under feudalism in India, the chiefs and lords had juridically no right on land, except that of collecting tributes. And the village community, despite many changes, continued to exist right through the Middle Ages, down to the beginnings of the British rule.

The self-sufficient village community was based "on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on the unalterable division of labour which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and a scheme, ready, cut and dried" (Marx). The rent paid to the lord was actually the surplus product of this combined agricultural and industrial family labour, "no matter whether rent in kind contains more or less of the industrial product as is often the case in the Middle Ages, or whether it is paid only in the form of actual products of the land" (Marx).

The village administration in feudal India was supervised by the village elder or headman and a clerk, and managed by the elected village council or panchayat. It was incumbent on the headman to put the decisions of the general gathering of the community into practice. He was in a key position and had great responsibility. He mediated in the quarrels among the people, organised defence against outside atacks, and generally protected the interests of the community as a whole.

The village elder and the clerk had their own inherited property,

and, in addition to it, received a share of the produce which was generally much more than what the artisans and servants received. The elder, the clerk and the brahmin priests were in a position to show more economic initiative, and they naturally amassed more wealth than the other members of the community. In the circumstances, it was easy for them, in their turn, to become petty feudal lords themselves, exploiting the labour of others.

Each self-sufficient village community had, as pointed out already, its own artisans and common workmen like carpenters, smiths, washermen and barbers; and they had their own separate organisations based on caste. Each received from the community a small portion of the surplus. Artisans sometimes got a piece of land also on which they could work independently. Each worker was a part of the community, and had a definite responsibility towards it, based on custom and tradition. It was a "natural economy," in which the artisan was not interested in improving his tools and increasing the productivity of his labour.

On the other hand, as rent was paid out of the products of combined agricultural and industrial labour, it became possible for some rural families to find spare time to work for themselves and to produce some surplus above their bare means of subsistence. This, in turn, gave rise to greater differences in the economic position of the individual families, and the richer sections could go to the market to sell their surplus products. The lords also exchanged a part of their rent for other articles of consumption. This led to the system of commodity exchange, first on the basis of barter and then through the medium of money. And gradually markets emerged in various parts of the country.

There were mainly four social groups within the feudal village community. First, there were the exploiting upper classes consisting of government officers, priests and village administrators who possessed the best land. The second group was made up of independent peasant communities or joint families, who, too, possessed lands. Below them were the actual cultivators, and lowest of all came the artisans like carpenters and smiths, and labourers in general. The last two social groups were the most exploited sections. The upper classes, in alliance with the feudal

chieftains, used their social position and influence to safeguard the traditional order.

Thus, the village community under feudalism, far from being the gentile organisation of the primitive tribal society of the occupational Aryans, developed as a unit of diverse groups, paving the way for class differentiation and class conflicts. It would, therefore, be wrong to assume that the Indian village community system remained a changeless entity since the ancient times. The fact was that many changes occurred in its content, while its forms remained unchanged in many respects.

Changes in the economic structure in general, and the village community in particular, were accompanied by changes in the social customs, religious beliefs, ethics and philosophical outlook of the people.

Brahminism and the Varnasrama system, as pointed out earlier, arose during the disintegration of the old tribal communism and the emergence of slavery, and in their early stages they operated as factors helping and accelerating social development. But, they reflected in the main the interests of the dominant priestly class, the brahmins. With the growth of productive forces and exchange relations, and the consequent strengthening of the position of kshatriyas and vaisyas in social life, and with the shift in political trends in favour of bigger kingdoms and empires based on slavery, Buddhism appeared on the scene mainly as a revolt against Brahminism. New rulers like Asoka, who headed powerful states with slavery as their base, accorded official recognition to Buddhism and utilised Buddhist doctrines to create conditions for the expansion of wealth and trade, as we have already noted.

But, with further social changes tending to undermine the Varnasrama system and strengthen feudal production relations, both the old Brahminism and early Buddhism became inadequate. So, Hinduism, as distinct from ancient Brahminism, arose in this period as the religion of feudalism *par excellence*. Hinduism emerged as the result of a struggle against declining Buddhism and the progressive materialist content of the Samkhya-Nyaya-Vaiseshika philosophies, and also as the result of a rationalisation and assimilation of the deep-rooted superstitions and ritualism which had prevailed all along among the people.

The present habit of identifying Hinduism with ancient Brahminism does not take into account the distinction between the two from the historical standpoint. Hinduism as we know it today did not exist at all in the Vedic period. It was essentially a product of the Middle Ages. Significantly, none of the older philosophical works mentions the word "Hindu." It came into vogue only as late as the eighth century A.D., having been first used by the Persians who referred to the inhabitants of the Indus (Sindhu) valley of those times as Hindus. The Arab invasion later brought the followers of Islam to India. To make a distinction between the Muslim faith and the beliefs of the people whose territory they conquered, the latter came to be termed as the Hindu religion or Hinduism.

Hinduism developed as the religion of the feudal era, both in the realm of ideology and in day-to-day practice, so as to maintain and reinforce the new social structure that came into existence in the Middle Ages. It expressed the needs of feudalism just as ancient Brahminism expressed the needs of rising slavery. Yet, it was not entirely new, being based on the dogmas in the ancient Srutis and Smritis. Old tenets and doctrines were given new interpretations, and religious rituals and ceremonies received a new social significance.

As already noted, many tribes passed from primitive communism directly to feudalism without experiencing the rigours of Chathurvarnya. They came to feudalism with their totems and taboos, with their worship of trees, animals, demons, spirits and snakes and with their simple rituals and sacrifices. And Hinduism absorbed all these beliefs and practices. Thus, the ideas of the previous epochs of primitive communism, as well as those of Chathurvarnya, persisted in the feudal period, too; but, the special characteristics of Indian feudalism imparted a distinctive colour and form to the religious beliefs and philosophical systems of the times. The feudal Brahmin priests attempted to unify these diverse ideas and beliefs to serve a single social end. In this effort, they skilfully blended the ancient Brahminical doctrines and their rituals, the neo-Buddhist customs of image-worship, and the pre-Aryan tribal traditions of animism and totemism. Thus, they built up an extremely varied and complex religious structure.

We have seen how Brahminism of the Upanishadic period tried to evolve a Supreme Deity, "the one without a second" (*Ekamevādvitiyam*) out of the many Vedic gods. But, along with monotheism, polytheism also prevailed under feudalism. With the rise of feudal chieftains and rajahs owning only formal allegiance to the king, a number of gods and goddesses came to the fore. Three of them—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—assumed a fundamental aspect signifying the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. Hinduism with these countless gods and goddesses, thus, promoted parochial isolationism, and helped to consolidate feudal divisions on the basis of the village community—an excellent example of the ideological superstructure serving in its turn to strentgthen its own base. Each region, each community and each caste had its own gods and cults and ritual observances. The deities of the higher castes not only differed from those of the pariahs but they were also deemed infinitely superior. Unlike Christianity of the Middle Ages in Europe, Hinduism in India had no centralised authority to guide it and control the day-to-day life and religious practices of its millions of adherents living in different parts of the country. The daily life of the people was controlled not by any central laws promulgated by an established church, but by traditions, customs and usages rooted in the past and regulated by the local councils (panchayats) of the castes concerned.

The old, relatively simple system of the four varnas that had prevailed under slavery was gradually transformed into the new, extremely complex and ramified system of jatis or castes which having struck deep roots and proliferated during the centuries of feudalism remains a massive factor in Indian social life even today despite sustained attempts to uproot it completely. The caste system, in other words, originated as part and parcel of the feudal society in the Middle Ages. It was a curious combination of the old varnas with many occupational tribes, yet, vastly different from the Varnasrama system.

Under slavery, there were only varnas, and no castes. But, with the emergence of feudalism, only the brahmin varna continued as a caste. The other varnas lost much of their economic significance as special class entities; instead, within the village

community various castes and sub-castes appeared, each representing a definite trade or occupation.

Castes emerged, again, not only inside the old varnas, but also outside them. How did it happen? Side by side with the ancient slave owning states, innumerable tribes had continued to exist down the centuries, maintaining their separate entities as definite occupational groups. Some tribes were mainly agriculturists, some hunters, others cattle breeders, still others fishermen, and so on. There were also tribes which had developed into artisan groups such as masons, tanners, basket-makers and locksmiths. Each specialised in its own work, had its own religious cults and internal organisation, with endogamous ties of kinship. It was under feudalism that these tribes too hardened into castes. Feudal society, thus, became a fantastic labyrinth of numberless castes and sub-castes. The brahmins were at the top, but they themselves were divided, first into priests and laymen, and then into a number of sub-castes, each with its own customs and practices, yet all observing some common rules. What a change from the simple Varnasrama system!

The caste system was, in fact, an ossified form of the primitive social division of labour. Under the new dispensation, it was impossible for any person to change his hereditary profession or the conditions of life assigned by the customs and conventions of the past. At the same time, different customs and different levels of development prevailed in different parts of the country. The Sukraniti laid down that the king should not interfere with the different customs followed by various castes and sects. "Those customs that have been introduced in the country, caste, or race should be maintained in the same condition; for, otherwise the people get agitated."[7] And some of the customs mentioned are quite interesting: "In the southern countries maternal uncle's daughters are married by Brahmanas. In Madhyadesa the artisans and artists are beef-eaters, men are all flesh-eaters, women are addicted to intercourse with others than their own husbands.... People of Khasa country marry the widows of their brothers. These peoples

[7] *Sukraniti*: Sarkar's Translation, IV. 5., pp. 89-93.

do not deserve penance and punishment because of their actions."[8]

Castes under feudalism were, thus, mutually exclusive socio-economic groups of people organised in a hierarchial order, with vertical as well as horizontal ramifications. They were based on hereditary occupation, endogamy and commensality, which became more and more rigid in course of time. The brahmin's son was always a brahmin, the blacksmith's son always a blacksmith, the pariah's son always a pariah. Each caste, with its rigid social observances forbidding intermarriage and interdining with other castes, was a distinct social unit which functioned as an integral part of the society as a whole. Excommunication was the extreme punishment given for violation of customary rules prescribed for each caste or sub-caste. Each caste fulfilled a definite role in productive activity on the basis of immutable social divisions of labour in such a way that the surplus labour of the primary producer who belonged to the lower castes could be exploited by those belonging to the upper castes. The ancient Varnasrama, at least, in its incipient form, did not know of untouchability which came into being with the caste system. The feudal *elite* looked down upon physical labour and treated all those castes which lived by working with their hands as inferior and untouchable.

It cannot be denied, however, that the caste system, being the medieval form of social division of labour, served a useful historical purpose in its own way for a certain period. But, Hinduism clung to it even after it had become an impediment to the further advance of society. And the immemorial law of karma was used to give the system religious sanctity. The belief in karma took deeper roots under feudalism. It was considered necessary to rid the soul of the evil effects produced by evil actions. If they were not redeemed in one life, the soul had to come back again to the world. The belief in metempsychosis was one of the basic corollaries of the law of karma. Only by good actions could the soul free itself from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Emancipation from worldly suffering caused by this endless chain of birth, death and rebirth was known as moksha which meant eternal bliss.

[8] *Sukraniti*, IV. 5., pp. 94-9.

According to the law of karma, happiness and misery were the results of actions performed by men in this life or in some past existence. It justified the inequalities of the caste system by the simple argument that some were born in a higher station and others in lowly circumstances in consequence of their actions in the previous birth. There was no use fighting against or grumbling about oppression, cruelty and injustice because everything was ordained by karma. The seeds of good and bad actions accompanied the immortal soul even after it separated from its transitory, corporal body. Thus, the primitive, animistic concept of the soul was given a new emphasis and meaning by feudalism. It was laid down that the soul left the body at the time of death and was taken to the God of Death, Yama, who consigned it either to heaven or hell, according to its earthly actions. And the soul would be reborn in the world with its lot depending again on its past conduct. Such doctrines diverted the people's attention from the social and economic causes of human suffering and inequalities, and inculcated in them passivity and meek resignation to their fate. The law of karma covered man's entire life and activities. Everyone had to perform the duties assigned to his jati and strictly observe all the rules of conduct of the caste system and its concomitants like untouchability and unapproachability. If anybody dared to question the ethics of such doctrines, and deliberately neglected his jati-dharma (caste duties), he was immediately punished with social ostracism. Caste discrimination under feudalism was considered as divinely ordained.

The ideologies of the Hindu religion cleverly made use of many doctrines and concepts of Buddhism and ancient Brahminism. The early brahmins had been accustomed to eat meat, even beef. But, influenced by Buddhism and Jainism, the new brahmins of the feudal times became vegetarians. Many other changes in their pattern of living could also be traced to Buddhism. "Image worship, which was unknown in ancient times, was introduced in imitation of the later form of Buddhism. Temples of worship, which were also unknown to ancient Hindus, multiplied in rivalry with Buddhist churches. Buddhist processions and festive celebration were surpassed in pomp by Hindu festivals. The practice

of making pilgrimages to holy spots, which was peculiar to the Buddhists even from the time of Asoka the Great, was so effectually adopted by the later Hindus, that holy places of Hindu pilgrimage multiplied all over India and drew millions of devout men and women from year to year. And lastly, as every Buddhist professed his faith in a Trinity, so the Hindus of this later age conceived a Hindu Trinity and paid their worship to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the supreme deities of their Hinduism."

Large temples were built not only for Vishnu and Siva, but countless other gods and goddesses all over the country. Prayers and pujas, festivals, dances and music, were organised in these popular places of worship, in which devotees took part and gave their offerings. Many gave away their lands and other properties to the temples supervised by brahmin priests. And often the priests arrogated to themselves such land gifts.

The brahmins, moreover, used the Vedas and other sacred texts, whose custodians they were, to conserve the privileges of the feudal upper classes. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which originally were sagas of mythological heroes and great men, came to be invested with a new religious and methaphysical significance, the old heroes being endowed with divinity and declared as incarnations (avatara) of Vishnu. Many other puranas (mythology) were written at this time. Singing praises of the sacrosanct caste system, the priesthood exhorted the people to reconcile themselves to their present lot with faith in ultimate redemption, moksha.

It was against this background that the time-honoured village community system remained stagnant through the centuries, unaffected by political turmoils and changes in the fortunes of kings and emperors at the top. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Indian feudal structure, even with its infinitely involved system of castes and sub-castes, had a progressive historical role in its growing phase. It brought about a vast expansion of productive forces, in striking contrast to the economy of the ancient period, and made its own unique contribution to Indian culture and philosophy.

The emergence and development of feudalism coincided with a great efflorescence of literature, art, architecture and science. The magnificent temples of Ajanta and Ellora, with their beautiful

paintings and carvings, and huge tower-shaped temples of stone and bricks, testify to the high skill and ingenuity of the artisans of the period.

Far-reaching discoveries were made in mathematics and astronomy. Arya Bhata and Varahamihira in the fifth century A. D., and Brahma Gupta in the seventh century were the great pioneers in Indian science. Indian astronomers proclaimed that the earth revolved on its own axis.

After the ninth century A.D., there was a slackness in scientific and intellectual activities. Yet, occasionally, there were some remarkable achievements. The genius of Bhaskara of the twelfth century, for example, produced works which, according to Hogben, were "the foundations of European mathematics."[9] Sanskrit literature attained its full glory in the early stage of feudalism. Many folk tales and folk songs were translated into Sanskrit and Pali. Hitopadesa and Panchatantra were two of the most popular works in this field.

Perhaps, the first Mahakavya (long poem) in Sanskrit was the Buddhacharita depicting the life and teachings of the Buddha written by Asvaghosha in the first century A.D. Other celebrated poets and dramatists like Bhasa (second or third century A.D.), and Sudraka (third century A.D.), who composed the famous Mrichakatika (Clay Cart), followed him. And the great Kalidasa wrote his poems and dramas towards the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century A.D. Indian classical theatre also reached new heights in this period. Bhavabhuti, the author of Uttara Ramacharita, and Sreeharsha were two of the great poets of the seventh century A.D. Kadambari, the prose romance of Bana, appeared in the seventh century A.D.

The allround development of Sanskrit in this age gave a great impetus to creative activity and produced literary classics which have lost none of their appeal even today. But, after the ninth century A.D., there was a marked decline and decay of taste in all intellectual and artistic activities. The exuberance, realism and scientific enquiry of the early kavyas and plays gave place to pornography and obscurantist works. A similar decadence was noticeable in philosphic thought also.

[9]Hogben: *Mathematics for the Millions*, p. 286.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

REALISM, IDEALISM AND DIALECTICS

ACCORDING to many scholars who have dealt with the problems of Indian philosophy, there were mainly two world views in it: Realism and Idealism. Realism held that the external world was real and existed independently of our cognition. Idealism, on the contrary, asserted that the external world did not exist independently of the mind and that its reality depended on the mind.

It may be stated that in this sense there was not a single system of idealist philosophy in ancient India. Almost all philosophers of the first millennium B.C., who enquired into the primary cause of the universe and the man, recognised the reality of the objective world. Even the early Vedanta admitted that the external world functioned with or without our cognition and it was, therefore, a realistic school of philosophy. The problem that concerned them mainly was not whether human existence was real or unreal but how to end the ills and misery of man.

Of course, there were differences among the philosophers as to the origin of the universe and the nature and the composition of the world. Most of them agreed that the world had been produced as the modification of something which was itself unproduced. But, what was that something? That was the bone of contention. Some asserted that matter or prakriti was the source of the world, while others said that the world came into existence out of Brahman or pure consciousness. Those who believed in the primacy of consciousness over matter were known as idealists and those who argued that matter was primary and spirit secondary were called materialists. In this sense, Vedanta was idealist and Samkhya and Vaiseshika materialist.

Idealism was generally classified as subjective idealism and objective idealism. Subjective idealism held that there was no objective reality independent of the perceiving mind and that only cognition or consciousness was real. Objective idealism recognised

the existence of the world, but held that it was created by Brahman or was only the manifestation of Brahman. Going by this classification, there was no school of subjective idealism in ancient India, as already stated. Even Upanishadic idealism which was systematised into Vedanta could be classified as objective idealism as it did not deny the objective reality of the world. It was only with the rise of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism that subjective idealism emerged as a distinct philosophical thought in India. But, the subjective idealists themselves were divided into those who upheld the reality of cognition or consciousness and those who denied even that. Thus, another problem was raised: whether the source of the universe was a positive reality or a negative void. It must be remembered that, under the classification of realists and idealists, realists included not only materialists but all those who recognised objective reality, and by idealists only subjective idealists were meant. Many battles were fought between the realists and the idealists in this period to settle the problem of the existence of the world. While the Yogachara Vijnanavada, the main school of subjective idealism, denied the existence of the world and the Madhyamikas denied the existence of even consciousness, the Nyaya-Vaiseshika thinkers and the Samkhyavadins sought to establish the reality of the external world. The Mimamsakas, the Vedantins, the realists among the Buddhists—all were forced to join the struggle on one side or the other.

The Vaiseshika, the Nyaya and the Samkhya also underwent considerable changes under feudalism. The epistemology and metaphysics of these systems were developed in conflict with Buddhist theories, especially with the schools of Dignaga and the Yogacharas. Vatsyayana, Prasasthapada, Udyotakara, Vachaspathi Misra, Jayanta, Vyomasiva, Sivaditya, Sridhara and Vijnana Bhikshu were some of the well-known commentators on the Samkhya Sutra. Haribhadra was a Jaina philosopher. The Mimamsa and the Vedanta also found new exponents.

Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra contains little philosophy as such. It concerned itself with the Brahmana portion of the Vedas and dwelt mainly on sacrifices and rituals.

But, in the Middle Ages, philosophy became an indispensable

part of the Mimamsa school. Prabhakara and Kumarila (seventh or eighth century) of the Mimamsa school became two of the greatest champions of realism. This was not accidental, but necessitated by the demands of the changing times. Dharmendra Nath Sastry points out:

> "The Upanishadic doctrine of Monism was steadily tending towards the idea of unreality of the universe. If the world is unreal, where is the scope for sacrifices and enjoyments resulting therefrom in this and the next life ? It was therefore a sheer necessity for the Mimamsakas to combat the idealism of the Upanishads. Implicit reality of the external world being ingrained in human nature, it would be enough if they formulated a realistic structure of metaphysics which could appeal to the common man."

But, it is interesting to note that Mimamsa realism directed its attack not so much against the idealism of the Vedanta as against Buddhist idealism. This was, perhaps, necessitated by the sharp polemics started by the Buddhist titans like Dignaga and Dharmakirti and the champions of Yogachara Vijnanavada against realism. They had attacked the very basis of the epistemology of realism which had to be defended at least to save the Mimamsa rituals.

Vedantins, on their part, had to defend the validity of their most important means of knowledge, sabdapramana or scriptural testimony. The Buddhist schools of idealism based their doctrines on reason and attacked the validity of the scriptures. It was to meet this challenge that Gaudapada came forward with his Karika on the relationship between reason and scriptural testimony. Greater exponents of Vedanta like Sankara and Ramanuja soon followed. The spectacular clash between these scholastic giants belonging to various schools produced a mass of philosophical literature.

One of the characteristics of philosophy under feudalism was that, in this period, no original and independent work on philosophy worth the name was attempted. Most of the philosophers were content to write their commentaries and commentaries on

other commentaries on the existing systems. Even the great Sankara did not claim to have founded a new philosphical school beyond his exposition, restatement and elaboration of Vedic thought in his commentaries on the Prasthanatraya, *viz.* the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. But, it would be wrong to think that these philosophers did not contribute anything new to the treasure-house of Indian philosophy. Although they claimed that they were only humble followers of the older schools, what they actually attempted through their commentaries was to expound their own views on the problems of philosophy which agitated the thinkers of the medieval period. Some of them even took liberties with the original doctrines to which they owned allegiance and instilled new content into the old forms. This trend began with the rise of the idealist schools of Buddhism.

Buddhism, as we have seen, arose as a protest against Brahminism and served as an ideology for the expansion and consolidation of the Mauryan empire. But, under the impact of the social and economic transition in the country, it could not remain as it was originally preached by its founder and was subjected to far-reaching changes.

Within a century after the passing of the Buddha, dissensions had broken out among his followers. The council of monks held at a place called Vaisali could not prevent a schism in the Buddhist order caused by the revolt of the Mahasanghikas, mainly, on points of monastic discipline. Asoka lent his support to the main body known as Theravada or Sthaviravada. It was under his auspices that another council of monks met at Pataliputra in order to consolidate the Buddha's oral teachings into a system, to regulate monastic discipline and to purge the order of heretic doctrines. The teachings of the Buddha, handed down from generation to generation through word of mouth, were compiled from memory into what was known as the Tripitaka (the Three Baskets of Knowledge). The first of these was the Vinayapitaka which laid down rules of right conduct (vinaya) for Buddhist monks. The second called the Suttapitaka contained doctrines and discourses (sutta) attributed to the Buddha. It was divided into five groups *viz*, : Digha Nikaya (Long Group), Majjhima Nikaya (Medium Group),

Samjutta Nikaya (Connected Group), Anguttara Nikaya (Progressive Group), and Khuddaka Nikaya (Minor Group). The third Pitaka known as Abhidhammapitaka (Basket of Supplementary Doctrines) consisted of commentaries on Buddhist doctrines.

Not all the sermons and discourses attributed to the Buddha could be taken as authentic. It was difficult to specify what exactly were the Buddha's own words. Under such conditions, differences were bound to appear among the followers of the Buddha. First, they were divided into two major groups: the Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle) and the Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle), and then to a number of sub-divisions. Tradition records that, within two hundred years after the death of the Buddha, Buddhism was divided into eighteen sects, each claiming adherence to the Buddha and his teachings. The most important schools of philosophy which developed out of these various sects were the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Yogachara and Madhyamika schools. The first two belonging to the Hinayana were the earlier systems of Buddhist pilosophy. The last two, which appeared later, belonged to the Mahayana.

As against the monistic idealism of the Vedanta, the Vaibhashika declared that no independent spiritual substance called atman or soul existed in human beings. Man was regarded as a combination of material and psychical dharmas. The teaching on dharma as the ultimate reality underlying every phenomenon was the central principle of Vaibhashika Buddhism. Dharmas were eternal elements of existence and they acted and reacted among themselves. They consisted not only of material but also spiritual or psychical elements. These dharmas were eternal and unchanging, but the objects formed out of them were transient. Objects were nothing but everchanging dharmas. Man's personality and his spiritual aspects also were a ceaseless stream of everchanging dharmas. According to the Vaibhashika, this eternal stream of dharmas attained peace and bliss only in the state of Nirvana. Nirvana could be realised by stopping the stream of dharma, *i.e.*, by suppression of all desires and emotions. Such teachings on dharma and Nirvana did not, however, blind them to reality. They argued that objects perceived had real existence independent

of the mind, spirit or consciousness. They not only accepted the atomic theory of evolution in regard to the material world, but also laid stress on the momentariness of every object. How then did we get the impression of the permanence of objects? They replied: "The forms of the object penetrate one after another into the understanding, the illusion of simultaneity is caused by the swiftness of the proceeding. Just so as an arrow passes through the eight leaves of a flower, as it were, at the same time, and a firebrand appears as a circle."[1] The effect was similar to the cause, and because of this the illusion of continuance was created. The flame of light was also taken for an example. The flame changed every moment, and new flames rose out of the old ones. The old and the new were similar and, therefore, we imagined that it was the same flame.

Such a system obviously had no need for Brahman or a Supreme Being as creator of the universe. While dealing with this question, Yasomitra, the commentator of the Vaibhashika work, Abhidhammakosa, put it very plainly: "The creatures are created neither by Isvara nor by purusha (spirit) nor by pradhana (matter). If God was the sole cause, whether the God was Mahadeva, Vasudeva or another, whether spirit or matter, owing to the simple fact of the existence of such a primordial cause, the world would have been created in its totality at once and at the same time. For it cannot be admitted that there should be a cause without an effect; but we see the creatures coming into existence not simultaneously, but successively, some from wombs, some from buds. Hence we have got to conclude that there is a series of causes and that God is not the sole cause.... The sons of Sakya hold that the evolution of the world has no beginning."[2]

The theory of knowledge advocated by the Vaibhashikas was in certain respects akin to the position of sensualism. It emphasised the decisive role of the senses in the cognition of an object. Vasubandhu, elaborating the Vaibhashika doctrines in his great work, Abhidhammakosa, clearly stated that consciousness did not exist independently of the objects perceived. The element of con-

[1]Quoted by Radhakrishnan: *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 621.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. 623.

ciousness, according to the Vaibhashika, wrote Stcherbatsky, "never appears alone, but always supported by an object (vishaya) and a receptive faculty (Indriya)."[3] According to the Vaibhashika, knowledge corresponded with the external object. Cognition of an object was produced simultaneously with the object. But, cognition did not take place if there were only the intellect and the object. Senses played a decisive role in Vaibhashika epistemology. Sensation was not merely the result of contact of the mind with the external object through the sense organs. As Stcherbatsky defined, "a moment of colour (rupa), a moment of the sense-vision-matter (cakshuh) and a moment of pure consciouneses (citta) arising simultaneously in close contiguity, constitute what is called the sensation (sparsa) of colour."

Thus, according to the Vaibhashikas, the external object, the sense and the cognition were three simultaneous moments. The Sautrantika view also was that external objects gave form to our thought. The diversity in the forms of thought was the result of the diversity in external objects. According to Madhavacharya, they argued as follows: "If any one objects that the externality of an object synchronous with cognition is inadmissible, we (Sautrantikas) reply that this objection is inadmissible, inasmuch as the subject in juxtaposition to the sensory imposes its form upon the cognition then in production and the object is inferrable from the form thus imposed."[5]

Whatever the difference in details, the doctrines of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika were, on the whole, materialistic. And they contained elements of dialectics. As Engles pointed out, spontaneous dialectical thought was inherent in early Buddhist philosophy as in early Geek philosophy.

In course of time, however, Buddhist philosophy tended to become more and more idealistic. The materialist principles of the realistic schools of Buddhism were revised by the Madhyamikas into idealist principles. Dharmas began to be explained not as the

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[4] Stcherbatsky: *Central Conception of Nirvana*, p. 55.

[5] *Sarvadarsana Samgraha*, translated by E. B. Cowell and A. E. Gough; p. 28. Varanasi 1961.

ultimate elements of existence in the phenomenal, empirical world, but as illusive phenomena of an eternal, unchanging Nirvana which came to be considered as the substratum of existence.

The Yogacharas or Vijnanavadins were subjective idealists who did not admit the existence of external objects. According to them, the subject did not perceive the object directly, because cognition intervened between the subject and the object in perception. In other words, the perception of an object was vitiated by its cognition. Thus, what was directly perceived was only cognition. The Yogacharas, therefore, held that only cognition was real and not the object. They admitted the existence of a series of momentary cognitions. And these cognitions were believed to have the power to apprehend by themselves. They were self-luminous (svayam-vedana). Nothing existed outside independently of the mind; and every object was the product of consciousness. This meant that all objective reality could be reduced to thought relations. Refuting the tenets of the Sautrantikas who were realists, the Yogachara philosophers declared that matter was only an idea in the mind of the observer, consisting of clusters of sensations and nothing more. According to them, consciousness or vijnana was self-subsistent and did not depend on external objects. It was argued that ideas had no support in a corresponding external reality and that existence itself was not material but mental.

Thus, the Yogacharas tried to resolve the problem of man's relationship with the external world by reducing reality into concepts of human consciousness by merging the knower and the known. They reduced the world of senses to the world of ideas, which, however, were not static but dynamic and everchanging. Such a viewpoint, doubtless, was highly idealistic.

The Yogacharas at least admitted that cognition or intellect or consciousness was real, and that objects existed, if only in mind. But, the Madhyamikas went a step further and declared that all existence including consciousness was unreal, and that everything was void or sunya.

From the very beginning, Buddhism had denied the existence of a God, a Creator and the conception of an immortal soul. In this respect, the Madhyamikas were one with the other Buddhists.

Nagarjuna, the great expounder of Madhyamika philosophy, termed the concept of God a logical absurdity, a nonsensical and inconceivable category. But, along with God and soul, they threw away everything to the void. They stated that, as the world of objective reality was nothing but void, any attempt to analyse its nature was simply futile. Nagarjuna argued that everything was relative and, therefore, indefinable in itself, and so there was no way of discovering its essence. And, since the essence of everything was indefinable, indescribable and incomprehensible, nothing could be said to possess any essence of its own. "If entities are relative, they have no real existence," he argued. Here is an example of his highly abstract reasoning:

"There absolutely are no things,
Nowhere and none, that arise anew
Neither out of the selves, nor out of non-self;
Nor out of both, nor at random.
Four can be the conditions
Of everything produced;
Its cause, its object, its foregoing moment,
Its most decisive factor.
In these conditions we can find
No self-existence of the entities.
Where self-existence is deficient
Relational existence also lack."[1]

Nagarjuna and the Madhyamikas, thus, opposed the possibility of origination itself. The theory of cause and effect in their view was the result of ignorance, and the whole universe was an illusion. Such an attitude, it may be recalled, had never been taken by the early Buddhists, whose great glory was their exposition of the theory of cause and effect, on which they had based their doctrine of the impermanence of all things.

T.R.V. Murti describes the essence of Nagarjuna's philosophy as follows:

[1] *Madhyamika Sutra* of Nagarjuna, quoted from *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*, p. 341.

"Dialectical consciousness is engendered by at least two viewpoints (dristis) diametrically opposed to each other as thesis and anti-thesis. The opposition is total, as affecting every aspect of things and practically interminable as there is no appeal to experience. Philosophy, cultivated seriously and systematically, leads to this conflict in reason; dialectic is implicit in philosophy.

"The substance view (atmavada) of the Brahmanical systems and the modal view (nairatmyavada) of the earlier Buddhism are the two 'moments' of the Madhyamika dialectic. The primary alternatives are thus two: The affirmative (sat, 'is') and the negative (a-sat, 'not-is'). These are conjunctively affirmed and denied, yielding two derivative alternatives of the form both *is* and *not is* (sadasat) and neither *is* nor *not is* (na sat naivasat). This is the celebrated *catus-koti* of the Madhyamika. These four alternatives represent all the possible stand-points from which every problem can be viewed; they also provide a scheme under which all systems of philosophy can be classified.

"The conflict is sought to be resolved in other dialectical systems, as in Hegel and Jainism, by synthesizing or combining the alternatives. In the Madhyamika, the resolution is achieved by rejecting the alternatives taken singly or in combination and rising to a higher stand-point which is already no position. Every thesis is turned against itself; its implicit self-contradiction is laid bare by the dialectic through *reductio ad absurdum* (prasanga) arguments."[7]

The absolute negation of the subject and the object was supposed to open the doors of prajna (wisdom) or the realisation of the tatva free from contradictions of "is" and "not-is." That was Bliss which, according to Nagarjuna, consisted "in the cessation of all thought." Thus, Nagarjuna's nihilism was not merely an exercise in absurdity; for, the path of absolute negation led to the acceptance of a negative Absolute.

Commentators like Dignaga (fifth century A.D.), Dharmakirti

[7]T. R. V. Murti: *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*, Vol. I, p. 206.

(seventh century A.D.) and Dharmottara (ninth century A.D.) went further and enriched still more the dialectical content of Buddhism. However, in the very development of dialectical aspects, they contributed also to the strengthening of idealist thought.

These philosophers applied their minds to the problem of understanding the characteristics of a particular object, even while recognising the inevitability of incessant changes. This led them to grapple with the problems of cause and effect, the nature of perception, the validity of drawing inferences from certain observations, the relations between the material world and the mind, and such other questions. And it redounds to their credit that they arrived at many fundamental postulates on such questions.

According to some writers, Dignaga belonged to the Vaibhashika school and to some others he was a Sautrantika philosopher. Stcherbatsky, however, is of the view that Dignaga belonged to a hybrid school of Sautrantika-Yogachara. Dharmendranath Sastry agrees with Stcherbatsky and says that Dignaga belonged to some sort of a "composite Sautrantika Yogachara School."

According to Dignaga's analysis, the factors essential for perception were the sensory organs and the mind. Objects were perceived with the help of sensory organs. But, as the objects themselves were constantly undergoing changes, the particular object in a particular context had only a transient, momentary existence. One associated this object with certain circumstances, in the context of which one perceived it at a given moment. Observed later, the object apparantly remained the same; but, it had really undergone changes. So, Dignaga argued that the very momentariness of an object made it capable of being understood only in relation to its past and its future. Yet, even during the moment of understanding, the object changed. There was an inevitable time lag between the instant when the object served as the cause of perception and the instant when it was actually apprehended. By the time the object was perceived and apprehended, it would have undergone changes.

Dignaga continued to argue that the external reality, which was, thus, born every moment and changed the very next moment, existed in the form of interrelated particulars, or svalakshanas.

Real particulars, one after another, came in momentary sensation. Each particular element was grasped by sensation on the basis of momentary particulars, and a generalised form was built up by the mind. This was called determinate knowledge (adhyavasaya). It was this knowledge that reflected the universal aspects, samanyalakshanas, of the object. The determinate knowledge converted the perception of objects into a conscious experience. Thus, Dignaga arrived at the conclusion that the generalisation of the particulars grasped by sensation was not an external reality but a mental construction. Stcherbatsky, pointing out the similarity of Dignaga's dialectical world view to the Marxist dialectics, said: "Dignaga, in accordance with the general Buddhist doctrine, maintained that reality or the unique particular or lakshana was being born every moment, and dying the very next moment. His theory was diametrically opposed to the static conception of the realist schools which conceived the universe as made of stationary and isolated objects. Against them, Dignaga pointed his kinetic conception of the universe as a constant forward movement of interlinked and interrelated point-instants (samskrita-dharmas) of reality. Marxism also holds that everything is interlinked and interrelated and is in constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change."[8]

The fight put up by these medieval Buddhists against the current static conception of reality was remarkable for its brilliant dialectics. But, in the very course of this fight, some of them turned their philosophy upside down and adopted idealistic standpoints. Dignaga, for example, explained the comprehension of objects which existed in space and time, their qualities and their movements in terms of a generalised form of Samanyalakshana; but this subjective generalisation, in his view, had no counterpart in the real external world, for, the object presented in perception was not as it existed in the external world. It was a construction of our imagination (savikalpa). Only the conjecture of the dynamic, functioning mind, he maintained, made the cognition of an object

[8]Stcherbatsky: *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I.

possible. Hence, the knowledge of reality could not be equated with reality. Perception, according to him, helped one to understand reality, but did not by itself produce knowledge. Knowledge was possible only when definite impressions of the object were recorded on the mind. Supposing we hear a humming sound in the distance, it may be the humming of a swarm of bees or something else. Only the functioning of the active mind could give a clear answer to the question. So he argued, and the line of reasoning appeared to be unexceptionable. But, when Dignaga went further and declared that only the functioning organs of sensory perception were real, while our knowledge of an object and its qualities was unreal, that whatever was outside the purview of pure sensation belonged to the sphere of inference and that every determinate perception was savikalpa or production of the mind, his line of argumentation led him to a stand denying the ultimate reality of the external world and recognising the mind as the only reality; for, he rejected the reality of not only Brahman and atman but also of matter. This was pure idealism.

Dharmakirti, too, conceded the existence of reality independent of the mind and the momentariness of all objects. The reality of the material world could not be rejected purely because it could be known only through the sensory organs and the mind of the knower. The external objects, in fact, made the sensory organs function. The mind with the aid of the sense organs formed definite ideas or impressions about the objects. This constituted the process of cognition. He further elaborated the indissoluble relations between cause and effect devoting considerable attention to the problems of the relationship between thought and action, between practice and knowledge, between the object and the subject. He warned that insufficient or incorrect knowledge obstructed the realisation of one's objective. He said: "The qualifier, the object to be qualified, the relation and environment of the object—all these factors are cognized and arranged by the intellect, and then alone there is comprehension, and not otherwise."[1] He, therefore, maintained that, in the ultimate analysis, genuine

[1]Quoted by D. N. Sastry in *Critique of Realism*, p. 448.

comprehension of an object was not possible by means of direct perception: "Everything other than the extreme particular (svalakshana) is generalisation (samanyalakshana) which is comprehended by inference." Pratyaksha or direct perception comprehended only the extreme particular, and inference alone could comprehend generalised reality. Such views, elaborated in the fight against realism, inevitably led Dharmakirti also to the camp of idealism.

Dharmakirti's ideas and precepts, dating from the seventh century, were further strengthened and developed by Dharmottara in the ninth century. He became renowned as the commentator of Dharmakirti's Nyaya Bindu. According to him, the object directly apprehended in sensation was different from the object actually conceived. He said: "The directly perceived and the distinctly conceived are indeed two different things. What is immediately apprehended in sensation is only one moment. What is distinctly conceived is always a chain of moments cognized in a construction on the basis of some sensation."

Besides Dignaga, Dharmakirti and Dharmottara, there were also other exponents of Buddhist thought in the Middle Ages, who contributed to the dialectics in terms of mental abstractions.

Every system of ancient Indian philosophy contained some rudimentary principles of epistemology (pramanavada). In the Middle Ages, they were more in the picture, being related to the major conflict between idealism and realism. The nature of reality, the relation between object and subject, substance and property, nature of cognition, the relation between cause and effect—everything became a subject of controversy.

The early Indian philosophers looked at the world as a series of causes and effects interacting on each other. In the Middle Ages, the doctrine of causality became all the more important because the philosophers were bent upon proving or disproving the existence of objective reality. Idealist philosophers were not prepared to acknowledge the objective causal connection in the sequence of phenomena. They looked upon causality as a subjective category. The Madhyamikas, extreme idealists, maintained that the effect coming out of a void was in itself Void, *i.e.*, neither cause nor effect

existed. The Yogacharas agreed with the Madhyamikas that only the cause existed, and not the effect. According to them, cognition was a real entity. Advaita Vedanta was very near to Yogachara in this respect, for, it, too, maintained that cause was the only reality and the effect nothing but illusory. But, as far as the ultimate cause was concerned, the Buddhists and the Vedantins differed.

The realists acknowledged the objective character of causality. They opposed the idealists with their theory that both cause and effect were real and connected with each other. Of course, there were differences among them also. The Nyaya-Vaiseshikas, for example, argued that effect was produced from the cause and that it did not exist before while the Samkhyas held that effect existed in the cause itself and that, therefore, what came about as the effect was not basically different from the cause. To use the Sanskrit terminology, the relation between cause and effect—say, between the yarn and cloth—was a samavayi sambandha for the Nyaya-Vaiseshika schools, while for the Samkhyas the yarn was an upadana karana, a material cause.

Causality was inseparably connected with epistemology. The philosophers of the Middle Ages paid great attention to the means of knowledge, because on them depended the existence or non-existence of reality. Perception, inference, verbal testimony (sabda), analogy and implication were the main pramanas or means of valid knowledge. Needless to say, there were differences in approach and emphasis. Some emphasised perception and inference, others only inference and still others sabda pramana. The main contention between the realists and the idealists was on the extent of validity of perception and inference. The syllogism first formulated by the Nyaya philosophers was used with varying modifications for this purpose.

As stated earlier, a syllogism according to the Nyaya consisted of five members: the minor term (paksha), the middle term (hetu), the major term (sadhya), example (udaharana), application (upanaya) and the conclusion (nigamana). The five propositions are, as cited earlier:

1. This hill has fire (paksha).

2. Because it has smoke (hetu).
3. Whatever has smoke has fire, *e.g.*, an oven (udaharana).
4. This hill has smoke which is invariably associated with fire (upanaya).
5. Therefore, this hill has fire (nigamana).

It may be noted that the first, *viz.* the minor term is the proposition or logical statement which is to be proved, and the last the conclusion drawn from hetu, udaharana and upanaya. Hill is the minor term, fire the major term and smoke the middle term. The association of the middle term with the major term was called vyapti. The knowledge of the major term's presence in the minor term was obtained by the knowledge of the middle term which existed in the minor term. In other words, the presence of fire in the hill was inferred from the presence of smoke in the hill. Thus, vyapti or invariable concomitance was the most important aspect of knowledge by inference.

Dignaga changed this into a universal proposition expressing the inseparable relation between the middle term (smoke) and the major term (fire) by means of a syllogism consisting of only three members as follows: The hill is fiery because it has smoke. Anything that has smoke is fiery, such as the oven. Anything that is not fiery has no smoke, such as the lake.

Thus, the relation between the middle and major terms served as the major premise in this syllogism.

The implications and importance of such syllogisms would be understood properly in the context of the ideological struggles going on at the time as, for example, the controversy about the existence of atoms. The Nyaya and Vaiseshika philosophers asserted that the universe was made up of atoms which were real. The Yogacharas, with equal vehemence, declared that atoms never existed. Their argument was simple. Atoms were imperceptible and, therefore, could not be proved by perception. They had, therefore, to be inferred. Inference depended upon the observation of an invariable concomitance of the middle term and the major term. Here atoms constituted the major term. But, they were not perceived. So, the ground of inference, *i.e.*, invariable con-

comitance with the middle term, also, could not be perceived. Therefore, the existene of atoms could neither be perceived nor inferred. Now, according to the Buddhists, perception and inference were the only valid means of knowledge. And, since existence of atoms could be established by neither, atoms simply did not exist!

Obviously, this kind of logic had its own limitations as it did not go deeper into all the different aspects of a phenomenon in terms of their dynamic connections and interconnections. Yet, it cannot be denied that the conflicts between realism and idealism raised Indian logic and dialectics to new heights.

CHAPTER TWENTY

TANTRA AND THE DECAY OF BUDDHISM

EARLY Buddhism, as pointed out earlier, arose in India when Brahminism of the later Vedic period had become a hindrance to the further progress of society, and when a new ideology corresponding to the consolidation of big slave-empires had become necessary. But, when class contradictions intensified and slavery began to give way to feudalism, even Buddhism became inadequate. It was to fill this gap that neo-Brahminism or Hinduism, with its full-fledged caste system, appeared on the scene. Just as ancient Brahminism under the leadership of brahmin priests had been the ideology of the period which saw the break-up of primitive communism and the rise of Varnasrama slavery, and early Buddhism under the leadership of the kshatriyas and vaisyas the ideology of the consolidation and expansion of a slave owning empire with its developing trade, art and culture, Hinduism was the ideology of feudalism in India. It may be noted that, along with the decline of the Mauryan state power, Buddhism which had enjoyed its patronage also began to decline. It was not in keeping with the new times and failed to satisfy the contemporary urges. The Gupta emperors, therefore, turned away from Buddhism and helped the revival of Brahminism in its new form. The Buddhists, however, did not give up without a fight. They gave battle to the brahmins both on religious and philosophical fronts, but they were a declining force, and had to retreat finally. The story of the decline and fall of Buddhism in India forms a fascinating study in itself, and has its tragic aspects and a moral for progressive movements everywhere.

Philosophical schools in ancient India grew independently of religious dogmas. But, this separation of philosophy from religion was never complete. In the Middle Ages, they were again brought together and some of the old philosophical systems turned into religious creeds. Different sects adopted different

forms of worship and codes of conduct. Since no religion could exist without symbols, rites and ceremonies, Buddhism also adopted certain forms of worship, codes of conduct and ceremonies.

Early Buddhism, as we have observed, did not believe in the existence of God or a Supreme Being. But, now, the Mahayana pundits changed the Buddha himself into the God of gods. The Buddha had denied the existence of an immortal soul. But, now, the Buddha Sakya Muni was worshipped as one of the many incarnations of the Bodhisattva. In the place of the Vedic sacrifices and Varnasrama dharma, early Buddhism had laid stress on moral perfection for the liberation of the individual. But, now, liberation of man depended not on personal qualifications but on the mercy of the saviour, the immortal Buddha. The Buddha, who had exhorted his followers to train and discipline themselves not merely as ascetics but as resolute fighters for social justice and reforms, came now to be looked upon as an apostle of negation, of total renunciation of the world. The Buddha, in short, was no longer seen as a man of action, inspired with a mission to change the world and cure it of its ills through purposeful work, but as one who wanted man to run away from life and its problems. Suffering and sorrow were ascribed merely to the ignorance of individuals, and not to the prevalent social conditions. Buddhism, thus, became a dogmatic religion instead of an enlightened philosophy; and the Buddha, who had never claimed any divinity for himself, was turned into the most revered idol. Substitution of cognition and vasana for reason opened the way to superstition, and worship of the Buddha was proclaimed as the only path to salvation. Thousands of Buddhist monasteries were set up under the patronage of the kings and feudal lords and merchants; and the monks who were attracted to them in large numbers led a far from ascetic life. Superstitious rituals, combined with elements of primitive magic and animism, became the order of the day.

Already in the beginning of the fifth century A.D., Vasubandhu had warned in his famous Treasure of the Abhidharma: "The religion of the age is at its last breath. This is an age in which the vices are powerful; those who want to be delivered must be diligent."

In the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., the decay of Buddhism was more evident. It was in this period that Tantric cults gained currency in the country, especially with certain branches of the Mahayana school which sought enlightenment in magical practices. "There is no doubt that the Tantras assumed importance in the Pala period," wrote Benoytosh Bhattacharya, "when even the universities like those of Nalanda and Vikramasila had to introduce them in their curriculum and keep regular professors to run classes for those who wanted a higher education in the Tantras."[1]

Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya has traced the origin of Tantric cults to the primitive agricultural society with its magical practices, mother goddesses and fertility rites. He is of the view that Tantricism was the popular name adopted by Lokayata, the essence of which was the protomaterialism related to the obscene rituals of primitive tribes. He then goes one step further and asserts that not only Lokayata but also Samkhya and Yoga developed out of Tantric beliefs and practices. "Tantrism," he says, "was the original complex out of which emerged the Sankhya and the Yoga of the later times."[2]

It is true that Tantricism adopted and absorbed many of the primitive beliefs and practices of the agricultural tribes of pre-class society. But, to assert that both were identical is to lose all historical perspective; for, an objective study of the two stages of social development, separated by not less than two thousand years, would make it clear that Tantric cults under feudalism had nothing to do with agricultural production or, for that matter, with the philosophical materialism of ancient India.

Among primitive tribes, magic played the role of science although in a negative way. It arose from ignorance of the causes of natural phenomena. In the Middle Ages, however, magic essentially played a social role. It found a way to the thoughts and practices of the people who were ignorant of the causes of social phenomena. It was no more a substitute for science; it prevented science. Contributing to the stagnation and economic backwardness of the village community, it prevented social advance. And the

[1]Benoytosh Bhattacharya: *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 218.

[2]Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya: *Lokayata*, XVIII, p. 63.

people, devoid of scientific understanding, tended more and more to escape from reality, seeking refuge in myth and magic, in mantras and tantras. Spiritual forces were supposed to do for man what he could not do himself. This was the background of Tantricism in India.

Tantra in practice had little in common with Vedic rites; yet, they did not oppose the Vedas. The Hindu Tantriks even claimed that they were the real followers of the Vedas. The Tantric agamas were believed to be the fifth Veda. Sir John S. Woodroffe wrote: "As men have no longer the capacity, longevity and moral strength required to carry out the Vaidika Kanda (the ritual section of the Veda), the Tantra Sastra prescribes a Sadhana (religious discipline) of its own for the attainment of the common end of all Sastra, that is, a happy life on earth, Heaven hereafter, and at length liberation."[1]

Similarly, the Buddhist Tantriks considered themselves as true devotees of the Buddha and aimed at the attainment of Buddhahood through the observation of Tantric cults.

In the ancient period, elaborate and complicated yajnas were associated only with the priestly class; for, only the brahmins were the custodians of Vedic knowledge. The common people were satisfied with simple worship and offerings. But, now, with the rise of temples and viharas, worship of the deity became widespread and an elaborate system of pujas, offerings, festivals and ceremonies developed. The more the rivalry between the Hindus and the Buddhists in the upper strata of society, the greater the competition in constructing temples and viharas and organising festivals and ceremonies. Through this, more and more pre-Aryan and non-Aryan people at various levels of development were sought to be drawn into the Hindu and the Buddhist folds respectively. Inevitably, this resulted in extensive assimilation of primitive animism and magic into both the religions. And the process got through mainly by Tantricism which in fact represented a creative synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan religious traditions.

[1]Sir John Woodrooffe (Arthur Avalon): *Sakti and Sakta*, Madras, 1929, p. 7.

Tantra was not mere worship or prayer. It was a very complicated system of rituals consisting of mantras, mudras, mandalas, etc. Recitation of certain mantras or spells was supposed to be very efficacious in fulfilling one's desires, and even defeating or harming one's rivals. Mudras were certain signs and gestures of the hand accompanying pujas. For instance, when water was offered, the sign of the fish (matsya mudra) was made. According to Woodroffe, it was "the expression of the wish and intention that the vessel which contains water may be regarded as an ocean with fish and all other aquatic animals."[4] Mandala was a diagram consisting of circles and squares drawn on consecrated ground for ritual and ceremonial purposes. The images on the floor represented psychic forces, gods and demons.

Different sects had different Tantric practices. The most important of the Buddhist Tantras were the Vajrayana and its offshoot Sahajayana. According to Sahajayana, truth could be realised through normal life without self-mortification. Vajrayana consisted of certain strange practices known as "abhicharas" which were used for selfish purposes and even to harm one's rivals or enemies. There were abhicharas for killing, paralysing, or neutralising an enemy, and for seducing or subduing a person. There were "elaborate methods of worshipping the gods and goddesses, making their images or paintings, chanting of the gathas (verses) and the mantras, the application of the mudras and drawing the mystic circles, the practice of Hathayoga as well as the contemplative yoga system and, last but not least, the sexo-yogic Tantric practices."[5]

Vajra meant Sunyata or void. In Vajrayana, everything was conceived in void. The image of the God, the materials of worship, the mantras and mudras, music, gestures and dancing, the worshipper himself, all were void!

Arthur Avalon quotes the Gandharva Tantra: "A man should worship divinity (devata) by becoming a divinity himself. If a person worships a divinity without himself becoming a divinity, he will not reap the fruits of that worship."

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 515.

[5] B. Dasgupta: *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Calcutta, 1950, p. 80

Thus, a Hindu devotee attains bliss by himself becoming a god or goddess. The Buddhist attains Buddhahood by becoming void!

The Buddhist Tantriks argued that the Buddha resided inside the body and that, therefore, Buddhahood could be attained by Hathayoga practices. Certain nerve-centres called Padma, Chakra, etc. were channels of occult force. Three of the nerves, two on either side of the spinal cord (the ida or lalana to the left and pingala or rasana to the right) and the third in the middle called chandali or sushumna were the most important. The left and the right nerves represented Right Knowledge (Prajna) and Right Means (Upaya) respectively and the central nerves Absolute Unity, Illumination or the Bodhi. Through yogic exercises, Wisdom and Means could be united to form the thought current of Enlightenment or Bodhichitta in the lowest centre, which moving along the middle nerve would lead to a state of motionless bliss.

Tucci explains this yogic exercise as follows: "Citta drawn along in these two canals (*viz*: lalana and rasana) by prana (breath) is always active and lively, puts us into contact with the outer world and brings to us the world's voices and impressions. Citta reacts in a thousand different ways and thus weaves the net which keeps us in prison with external things, and tends always to carry us outside ourselves. The aim of yoga is to cause the restless and unstable citta to flow back through the two veins which run respectively from the right and left nostril and meet at the perineum, into the chandali, namely: the medium canal which is thought of as running along the spinal column from the perineum to the brahmarandhra at the sagittal stature of the head."[6] Through this process, the chitta is supposed to become gradually purified "until it ceases all activity and vanishes in the supreme beatitude of the Sahaja, the Absolute Principle immanent in us."[7]

"In the human body," Sir John Woodroffe wrote, "Kula kundalini (the vital power of the universe) is said to reside in the root centre (muladhara chakra) of force evolution inside a coiling

[6]Giuseppe Tucci: *The Theory and Practice of Mandala*, London, 1951, p. 113.

[7]*Ibid.*

nerve (nadi). She coils round Svayambhu, the male aspect of Sabdabrahman and covers his mouth with her hood. Though sound is perpetually emanating from Her body, She is said to be slumbering."[8]

The task of the Sadhaka was to unite the female principle with the male principle. "This Sadhana is to be performed through the awakening of the forces within the body. A man is Siddha in this Sadhana when he is able to awaken Kundalini and pierce the chakras." The Sadhaka had to rouse the Sakti, "coiled away like a sleeping serpent (Kundalini), at the root of the spine and to lead it, with the help of breathing exercises called pranayama, through the sushumna up to the sahasrara in the head."[9] It was in that centre in the crown of the head that the male and the female powers were brought together in absolute, blissful union!

The concept of Sakti played a prominent part in the theory and practice of the Middle Ages. The union of man and woman was supposed to be the symbol of Siva-Sakti unity in the Hindu Tantras and the unity of Prajna and Upaya in the Buddhist. Siva was power and Sakti was energy. Without energy, Siva was lifeless. Without the unity of Wisdom and Means, no Buddhahood could be attained. The Absolute Unity of the male and the female principles was Bliss, the source of all creation.

Tantricism was divided mainly into two groups, the Vamachara sect and the Dakshinachara sect. The latter suggested that passions and sexual urges should not be suppressed, but ennobled, sublimated and transformed; the former, on the contrary, held that passions and sexual acts in their unsublimated form were the surest path to salvation. The Dakshinacharas emphasised the male principle while the Vamacharas paid more attention to the female principle. But, both exalted sex to a religious principle.

The Vajrayanists declared that there was nothing impure or unholy in this world. All forbidden things were good for a Sadhaka. Everything was Sakti or Void. When he drank wine or had sexual intercourse, he enjoyed it not as an ordinary individual, but as a god or a goddess. It was a religious rite which transformed

[8] Sir John Woodroffe: *Principles of Tantra*, Madras, 1960, p. 400.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 374.

Bhoga (enjoyment) into Yoga. The Buddhist work, Guhya Samaja Tantra, suggested that the attainment of Buddhahood became easier if the aspirants cultivated all sorts of sensual pleasures, because "the passions were the same as Nirvana" and "satisfaction of all desires succeeded where austerities failed."

Thus, one of the most important cults of the Tantra was what was called the Panchatatva, which meant the use in worship of the five M's—wine (madya), meat (mamsa), fish (matsya), parched grain (mudra), and sexual intercourse (maithuna). Atal Behari Ghosh explained these principles as follows: "The tattva of wine is bliss and the quickening of the inner organs. The Guru teaches his disciple how this bliss and the quickened inner senses have to be utilised for the uplift of the mind from the material plane. Sexual union also, as understood on the material plane, is to be used for the same purpose. The Guru shows how these two acts, *viz*: drinking and cohabiting which lead to man's fall are to be used not as animals do for the mere gratification of the senses, but for a higher purpose. With reference to the fifth tattva, the disciple is taught that this is something very sacred, and as it leads to creation of a new life, the greatest care should be bestowed upon the act."[10]

"It ought to be recognised by all seeing people," wrote Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya, "that the panchatatva worship in its principles and in its tendency, is a legitimate Advaita worship, if worship it can be called."[11]

The explicit aim of such practices was the attainment of Brahman or Buddhahood and not increase in worldly prosperity or the development of philosophical materialism. As far as the Buddhist Tantras were concerned, they certainly reflected the decay and degeneration of Buddhism as a religion.

The Buddha, as we have observed, was very strict about the rules of morality and ethics to be followed by his disciples, especially by the monks. He did not permit monks the use of fish, meat, wine and association with the opposite sex. But, Buddhism in its

[10]Atal Behari Ghosh: *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 201.

[11]Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya: *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 170.

decay sanctioned all these and encouraged all sorts of esoteric and abominable practices, thus, paving the way for the final isolation and fall of a philosophy which was once dynamic and revolutionary in its social implications. Swami Vivekananda who greatly admired the Buddha and his teachings observed thus on the degeneration and fall of Buddhism: "In spite of its wonderful moral strength, Buddhism was extremely iconoclastic and much of its force being spent in merely negative attempts, it had to die out in the land of its birth and what remained of it became full of superstitions and ceremonials, a hundred times ruder than those it was intended to suppress. Although it partially succeeded in putting down the animal sacrifices of the Vedas, it filled the land with temples, images, symbols, and bones of saints. Above all, in the medley of Aryans, Mongols, and aborigines which it created, it unconsciously led the way to some of the hideous Vamacharas. This was especially the reason why this travesty of the teaching of the great Master had to be driven out of India by Shri Shankara and his band of Sannyasins."[12]

When Buddhism abandoned its own religious discipline and adopted the popular beliefs and customs and rituals which were prevalent among the Hindus also, it became vulnerable to attacks from within and without. Its philosophical base was also weakened when the materialist teachings of the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika schools receded to the background and the Yogachara and the Madhyamika with their world-denying subjective idealism became the predominant schools of Buddhism. And, by this time, resurgent Hinduism had adopted certain philosophical principles of early Buddhism and some of the ethical and spiritual values taught by the Buddha.

Even after Buddhism was pushed to the defensive in Northern India, it continued for some time to dominate the South. But, the rise of the new feudal states made its position steadily weaker. The quarrels, rivalries and wars among the kings of South India were often reflected in the conflicts between Hinduism on one side and Buddhism or Jainism on the other. Many South Indian

[12] *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 499-500.

legends refer to this conflict in which the Saiva and Vaishnava saints took a prominent part. These saints became popular not only by their devotional songs but also by their fight against the Buddhist and Jaina religions. The downfall of the Pallavas in the South at the end of the seventh century and the rise of the Chalukyas, who had adopted Vaishnavism and their seizure of Kanchi about A.D. 733, marked the triumphs of Hinduism over Buddhism.

Indeed, the long period between the first and seventh centuries A.D., was an epoch of struggle between Buddhism and rising Hinduism in which the latter gradually gained ground. Kumarila Bhatta of the seventh century A.D. was an outstanding exponent of Hindu idealism, who challenged the Buddhist theories and concepts. With withering contempt, he questioned the right of the Buddhists to criticise the ancient philosophy of the Vedas and to attack the caste system. Pouring ridicule on the Buddha himself, he held forth in his Tantra, thus: "How could the Buddha, born in the ruling caste of the Kshatriyas, and violating the dharma of the caste by living as a beggar on the alms given by others, dare to advise others regarding the right path? . . . How can anyone follow his advice? The noble principles propagated by the Buddha, like compassion, non-violence, etc., are like good milk offered in a cup made of dog's skin. They are unholy, unreliable and unacceptable."

This is only one example of the tirade against Buddhism in the days of its decline. And it became increasingly difficult for Buddhism to withstand such onslaughts, coming as they did in the context of the changing social conditions with which it found itself out of tune. In the eighth century A.D., Sankara, the master idealist, launched his powerful philosophical offensive and Buddhism soon collapsed in the land of its birth. However, the standard of the Buddha continued to fly high in other regions of East Asia, like China, Japan, Siam, Burma and Ceylon.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

TOWARDS HINDUISM IN SOUTH INDIA

EARLY Buddhism and Jainism with their stress on ethical values had a special appeal in regions where tribalism still retained its last footholds. That must be the reason why they found a ready response in South India in the first centuries of the Christian era. Another reason seems to be that, among the ancient peoples of the southern parts of the country, the influence of Brahminism and its Varnasrama system was negligible.

The earliest writings depicting the life and aspirations of the ancient people of the South are found in the Sangam literature—a series of collections of poems couched in simple old Tamil by different authors in or around the beginning of the Christian era. Some scholars have ascribed them to the last centuries of the first millennium B.C. and others to the first centuries of the Christian era. Whatever the exact period, they undoubtedly had a non-Aryan origin and developed independently of the Sanskrit language.

The eight anthologies of lyrics known as the Ettu Togai and the ten collections of longer poems called the Pathu Pattu seem to be the earliest and the most outstanding among the ancient Sangam works. The eight anthologies were Narrinai, Kurundogai, Aingurunuru, Padirrupattu, Paripadal, Kalittogai, Akananuru and Purananuru. The Pathu Pattu was a collection of long poems composed by Nakkirar, Nallur Nattattanar, Mangudi Marudanar, and other poets. Some of these were odes to kings and chieftains and others were lyrics of love and romance. War, heroism and love were the favourite themes of these works. They reflected broadly the social and economic conditions and the life and customs of the people in the early days of civilisation in South India, although traces of primitive tribal life also could be seen in them.

Some of the Sangam poems convey the noble sentiments and broad vision of the ancient people. The stanza ascribed to

poet Kanayan in the Purananuru says:

All towns are as one for us,
All tribes are, in reality, only one tribe,
We know both good and evil to originate not from others,
Like them, both pain and relief arise from within;
Death is nothing new, life does not attract us by its sweetness;
We know no rage, of evil we do not complain;
By the vision of the wise we clearly see
That life so valued is carried along the path of fate,
Like a fragile raft carried by the stream
Of strong, impetuous and unrestrained mountain torrent
Which roars and battles against the rocks,
While the sky darts lightnings and cold rain pours
Knowing this and
Not being struck by the greatness of the great,
We do not despise the non-entity of the nobodies.

Significantly, there are no references to Brahman or the Supreme Soul or the rituals of Brahminism in them.

In later works like Tirukural and Naladiyar, composed most probably between the fifth and eighth centuries A.D., the influences of the ethical and philosophical ideas of not only early Buddhism and Jainism but also of Sanskrit classical works are evident. The Kural is an ethical treatise with precepts on morals for the householder, ascetic, sovereign, statesman and the lover. It also contains worldly wisdom on the way to attain perfection and the accomplishment of a virtuous life without any invocation of divine sanction or religious authority behind it.

By the time of the Sangam works, social and class differences had appeared in the South. Society was not divided into four varnas as under Brahminism, but, there were a number of occupational groups, some high and some low. In course of time differentiations took place within these occupational groups also.

Tolkappiyam, the most ancient of the existing Tamil grammars, written probably in the fourth or fifth century A.D., divided the country into five regions or tinais as they were called, *viz.* Mullai (forest land), Kurinji (mountain country), Marudam (wet land),

Neydal (sea coast), and Palai (desert land). This classification was made mainly with the aim of giving a background to poetry because, according to Tolkappiyam, "love-relations are a phenomenon when two persons have a love affair against the background of one of the landscape varieties with the aim of pleasure, benefit and virtues." But, the phenomena described in literature give us a fairly clear idea of the life and conditions of the people who lived in the different regions. They had their own religious beliefs and customs, quite different from those of Brahminism. Unlike the early Aryans, who worshipped the Sun, Indra, Maruth and other gods, the early South Indians worshipped deities like Mayon in the Mullai region, Seyon in Kurinji, Vendan in Marudam, Varuna in Neydal and goddess Korravai in Palai.

Some modern scholars have tried to identify these non-Aryan, Dravidian gods and goddesses as Aryan deities, for instance, Mayon as Vishnu, and Vendan as Indra. But, there is hardly any indication in Sangam literature to warrant this theory. This is not to suggest that the South Indian peoples and their gods had nothing in common with their northern counterparts. The Aryan and non-Aryan civilisations certainly influenced each other. Mutual contacts and relations were evident even in the last centuries of the first millennium B.C. And in the early Christian era they became stronger. It was under such conditions that Buddhism and Jainism began to flourish in South India. They influenced not only religion, literature and culture, but also politics, and many kings embraced Buddhism or Jainism and became patrons of monasteries. But, between the fifth and ninth centuries, along with economic and political changes and the rise of feudalism in South India, Buddhism and Jainism began to decline. It was in this period that the three feudal dynasties, namely, the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai were fighting for supremacy. It was also in this period that new Hindu religious cults like Saivism and Vaishnavism came to the fore and edged out Buddhism and Jainism from the scene.

The struggle between Hinduism, on the one hand, and Jainism and Buddhism on the other, left its traces in a vast body of literature both in Sanskrit and Tamil. It may be remembered that it was in

this period, too, that the idealists and the realists were fighting bitterly. The great philosophers of Buddhism, Jainism, Nyaya-Vaiseshika, Mimamsa and Vedanta wrote their works in Sanskrit, and hence their appeal was confined to the intellectual *elite* who were becoming more and more isolated from the masses, and who functioned in an ivory tower oblivious of the great changes, wars and social upheavals taking place around them. It was then that the Saiva and Vaishnava saints composed and sang their devotional songs in Tamil, which at once caught the imagination of ordinary people and won for them great popular following.

The origins of Saivism and Vaishnavism are shrouded in obscurity. According to some scholars, the rival religious cults of Siva and Vishnu had their origin in the class jealousies of brahmins and kshatriyas in North India in the later Vedic period, when the Vedic religion had begun to decline. Vishnu became the principal god of the brahmins, and Siva of the kshatriyas. In the Mahabharata, Saivism and Vaishnavism "divide between them the allegiance of the great masses of men."[1] There are also references in the epic showing that a section of orthodox brahmins was opposed to the worship of Siva. Some of the Kushan kings in the early centuries of the Christian era were devotees of Siva. They even "caused their coins to be minted with the images of Siva and of his emblems like the trident and the sacred bull on them."[2] But, along with the rise of neo-Brahminism in the third and fourth centuries A.D., we find Vaishnavism also on the ascent. The Guptas were ardent Vaishnavites.

Some scholars have traced the origin of the Siva cult to primitive pre-Aryan worship of the linga (phallus), and this has been confirmed by the archaeological findings from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. The pre-Aryan deity Siva continued to be worshipped by the people for a long time even after the Aryan conquest, perhaps because of the surviving pre-Aryan matriarchal influences. "Saivism," writes Ehrenfels, "has unquestioned relations not only with the cult of the goddess, but also with the very idea of matriarchy or at least its remnants."[3]

[1] T. P. M. Mahadevan: *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 457.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 456.
[3] Ehrenfels: *Mother Right.*

Whatever their origins, the fact remains that the Saivism and Vaishnavism which arose in South India in or about the sixth century A.D. were quite distinct from their northern counterparts of the pre-Vedic, Vedic and post-Vedic ages. In the South, they were essentially religious movements which arose as a protest against Buddhism and Jainism and ushered in the epoch of feudalism.

It was the Saivites who first raised the standard of revolt in South India against the Buddhists and Jainas who were already on the decline. As many as 63 Saiva saints known as Nayanars are said to have flourished between the sixth and the ninth centuries. Appar, Jnana Sambandhar, Sundarar and Manikkavachakar were the most important of them. They swept the country with a torrent of devotional songs in praise of the Almighty Siva, who was hailed as the head of the trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. These songs formed a treasure-house of religious experiences which tells "of mystical raptures and ecstasies, of moments of light when there is a vision of God and the world is transfigured in the light of his love, and of periods of gloom when all is dark and the blind seeker is filled with a sense of fear."[4]

God Siva was the ultimate reality, which revealed itself to the saints in the form of a personal God, and numerous poems sang His glory. Appar who is believed to have converted the Pallava king, Mahendra Varman, said: "We are not subject to any; we are not afraid of death; we will not suffer in hell; we live in no illusion; we feel elated; we know no ills; we bend to none. It is all one happiness for us; there is no sorrow; for, we have become servants, once for all, of the independent Lord, and have become one at the beautiful flowers thrown at the feet of the Lord."

Jnana Sambandhar who is supposed to have converted the Pandya king, Kun Pandya, to Saivism sang in one of his hymns: "The Lord's names are medicines, they are sacred mantras; they are the way to salvation in the other world; they are all the other good things, too; through them all acute miseries are destroyed; meditate only upon those names of the Lord."

And finally a hymn of Sundarar: "O! Lord ! without any other

[4]Nilakanta Sastry: *A History of South India*, p. 414.

attachment I cherished within my mind only thy holy feet. I have been born with thy grace, and I have attained the state whereby I will have no rebirth. O! Benevolent Lord at Kodumudi, worshipped and lauded by the learned. Even if I forget thee, let my tongue go on muttering thy mantra, Namah Sivaya."

Accompanied by groups of devotees, these saints travelled from place to place and from temple to temple, singing and dancing all the way, infusing in the mind of the people a disposition against Buddhism and Jainism and enthusiasm for their gospel. The spirit of the times was in their favour and Buddhism and Jainism were finally routed and ejected from the religious and philosophical arena. The kings were also converted to the new faith, and soon they became its patrons. It was in this period that huge magnificent temples were built in South India, with the lavish grants and endowments given by the kings and feudal chieftains.

Side by side with Saivism, Vaishnavism also began to flourish. According to tradition, there were twelve Vaishnava saints known as Alvars — Tirumangai Alvar, Kulasekhara Alvar, Tirupana Alvar, Periyalvar, Nammalvar and others. Nammalvar was apparently the most popular among them. The devotional hymns of the Vaishnava saints formed the great collection of Nalayiraprabandham or Divyaprabandham. These saints in their turn regarded Vishnu as the highest reality and the head of the trinity. According to the Alvars, salvation lay in devotion to Vishnu and not in rituals or sacrifices. The most important tenet of Vaishnavism was disinterested love for Vishnu; also one had to do his duty without any concern for the result. It stressed that God was accessible to all, irrespective of caste distinctions. In this respect, the new faith had a democratic character. In the mystical Vaishnavite hymns, the god was often pictured as a lover and the devotee a maiden who yearned for the lover. Nammalvar sang: "Tossing about restlessly with a mind that has melted, singing again and again and shedding tears, calling upon you as Narasimha and seeking you everywhere, this beautiful maid is languishing."

The Vaishnavites believed that through intense prayer and devotion the human body would become the abode of the Lord. Periyalvar declared: "O ! ills tormenting me for long, listen, I

tell you now, this body of mine has become the holy shrine of the great Lord, the cowherd Krishna; know that, hold here ; know that and go away ! That is not the old town, it has now been taken over as a protected place."

According to the Alvars, God could be attained not through the senses or the intellect, but through meditation and love. Thus, Nammalvar stated in one of his poems:

"The in-dwelling God is in all created things,
and in all religions professed by man;
It is vain to reach Him through the senses,
and He defies mere intellectual understanding;
Seek Him in the soul's sanctuary, the source of all life,
In firm meditation, but free from distrubing mundane thoughts,
And the Lord can be secured for ever."

Following the traditions of decadent Buddhism and Jainism, many Hindu temples, Mutts and Pathasalas (theological seminaries) were established in various parts of the country. Sometimes, the temples of the Buddhists or the Jainas were forcibly converted into Hindu temples. The Jainas and Buddhists had to suffer cruel persecution at the hands of the aggressive Saivites and Vaishnavites. "Not only hundreds and thousands of recalcitrant Jainas were driven out of the country, but many were forced by circumstances to embrace Saivism."[5]

In their early stages, Saivism and Vaishnavism concentrated their fire on their common enemies, Buddhism and Jainism. But, when these two were pushed out, the Saivas and Vaishnavas quarrelled bitterly. Vaishnavism developed mainly as the popular Krishna cult. Brahman was now identified with Lord Krishna, accompanied by his consort, Radha.

The simple religions of the Saiva and Vaishnava saints proclaiming intense love and self-surrender to the Divine marked the beginnings of Hinduism which became the dominant religion under feudalism. But, when feudalism was well established, the saints were turned into gods and worshipped in temples, and their

[5]Ayyangar and Seshagiri Rao: *Studies in South Indian Jainism*, p. 68.

teachings and ideals were all but forgotten. The simplicity, warmth of feeling and sense of beauty of the devotional hymns were superseded by mythological superstitions and metaphysical dogmatism.

Under the reign of Raja Raja Chola (A.D. 984-1013), the hymns of Appar, Sambandhar and Sundarar were collected and edited into Thirumurais, a series of eleven sacred works of the Saivites. These collections included the Tevaram, containing songs of the three great saints. Manikkavachakar of the ninth century A.D. added his own compositions like Tirukkovai to this treasure of Saiva literature. Later in the twelfth century, a mass of legends about the Saiva Nayanars or Nayanmars were collected by a poet called Sekkizhar and popularised under the title of Periyapuranam. These basic Saiva works, which reflected to a certain extent the social conditions of the new feudal era, are also full of miraculous stories and mystical exaltations, coupled with invectives against the Jaina faith. Besides, they contain expositions of the religious doctrines of the early Saivas and of their pet theme of the communion of jivatma (human soul) with the paramatma (universal soul), couched in fervent terms. In the thirteenth century, Meykandar wrote the basic text of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy of the later Middle Ages. As distinct from the teachings of the earlier saints, this new philosophy was nurtured and developed under the impact of Vedanta. It would, therefore, be better to deal with it only after we know the basic tenets of the Vedanta systems.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ADVAITA VEDANTA

WITH the growth and expansion of the feudal economy throughout the country in the Middle Ages, not only the Hindu religion but also the various systems of Indian philosophy passed through a phase of rich and varied development. Naturally, it was the path of highly abstract idealism. The outstanding philosophers of this period, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, drank deep at the fountain of the early Vedanta and the Upanishadic lore; there they found an ancient legacy of idealist thought which they could reinterpret effectively to suit the historic needs of the new age. But, while reinterpreting this ancient legacy, the later Vedantists often made substantial changes in the old idealist doctrines, so much so that sometimes, as in the case of Sankara, they appeared as the exponents of new idealist systems.

Sankara was born in a brahmin family at Kalady in Kerala, late in the eighth century A.D. But, the main centres of his activities were in North India. In the course of his short life—he died at 32 — he astounded his contemporaries and created a veritable storm in India's world of thought by his profound knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads and the various systems of philosophy. He toured widely all over India expounding his doctrines and challenging all his intellctual opponents by his powerful arguments. He wrote extensive commentaries on Badarayana's Brahma Sutra, the principal Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita; reformed systems of worship in the Hindu temples, and organised monastic centres (Mutts) in dfferent places far apart in India, like Sringeri in Mysore, Puri in Orissa, Dwaraka in Kathiawar and Badrinath on the snowy heights of the Himalayas.

The main works of Sankara consisted of commentaries on the Prasthanatraya (the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutra), some weighty philosophical poems like Soundarya Lahari and Viveka Chudamani, and a number of hymns. The most important of them from the philosophic standpoint are the

commentaries, through which he evolved his basic outlook and teachings. Sankara expounded a new idealist system of monistic philosophy known as Advaita Vedanta or absolute non-dualism.

The Advaita of Sankara was certainly not a mere restatement or exposition of the doctrines of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma Sutra. He revised some of the old concepts, added some new ones and enriched Indian idealist philosophy with many original contributions, though he claimed to have based his system of thought on the Upanishadic metaphysics.

A fundamental proposition of Sankara was that the doctrines laid down in the Vedas and the Upanishads were the one and only source of knowledge. Claiming authority from these ancient texts, he sought to justify every argument and viewpoint put forward by himself. The Samkhya doctrine of the origin of the world from unconscious primal matter possessed of the three gunas, the Vaiseshika philosophy with its doctrine of the atomic structure of the universe, the Lokayata which denied the independent existence of the soul and the Buddhist conception of the transitory character of every phenomenon—all these were refuted and vehemently denounced by Sankara. In his philosophical polemics against other ideologies and in his effort to establish his own system of thought, he leaned heavily on quotations from the Srutis and the Smritis.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable that Sankara's doctrines were vastly different from, and sometimes contradictory to, the philosophic speculations of the ancient rishis. The early Aryans, for instance, neither denied the reality of the world, nor did they consider sensual life as an evil; they, therefore, did not aspire for release from corporeal existence as a consummation devoutly to be wished for. On the contrary, they prayed for a longer life and more mundane happiness.

Sankara's views, as is quite evident, were a far cry from the optimistic world outlook and the earthiness of the early Upanishads, which, instead of proclaiming release from life and birth as the highest aim of man, promised sense enjoyment as the reward of knowledge. The Taittiriya said: "He who knows these great doctrines will obtain offspring, cattle, holiness, food and heaven."

The Isa said that performing the duties of this world one could desire a life of hundred years. None of the Upanishads denied the reality of the world or suggested that earthly life was an illusion or Maya. The rishis of old were engaged in an earnest intellectual enquiry into the origin of the world, into the first cause of all existing things. "In the Vedas, even including the Upanishads, there is not the slightest hint of the world and life in the world being of the nature of a bondage and of suffering."[1] The doctrine of release from this world as an end in itself was certainly a later development in Indian philosophic thought.

Sankara could not but notice that the Upanishads contained contradictory and divergent viewpoints and even materialist ideas. Many verses in the Upanishads were refutations of the concepts of an eternal, immutable Brahman and of the emergence of the universe from the Brahman. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, for example, we find: "In the beginning there was naught here; all-pervading death prevailed, covered everything," and in the Taittiriya Upanishad: "In the beginning there was non-being, and from non-being arose being." The Chandogya Upanishad spoke of "non-existence alone in the beginning." Yet, Sankara sought to interpret such stanzas in a way that would vindicate his Advaita theory. For instance, he explained that non-being or asat was not just a state of absolute void but that it denoted Brahman, the sat! Again, there are passages in the Upanishads which visualise fire, air, ether or akasa as eternal existence without an origin. If the elements are eternal, without an origin, Brahman as "the only one without a second" would be blown up. Sankara solved this difficulty simply by declaring the elements identical with Brahman!

The idealist philosophers of ancient India considered consciousness, idea or spirit as primary, and matter as derived or evolved from it; they, however, did not deny material reality. Sankara did not accept even this position. For him, matter simply did not exist. Brahman, the Absolute, whose nature was formed of existence (sat), consciousness (chit) and bliss (ananda) was the

[1]C. Kunhan Raja: *Indian Philosophy*, p. 252.

only and all-pervasive reality. The phenomenal world was unreal or merely illusory. This was the central tenet of Sankara's teachings. From this, he arrived at the conclusion that the jiva, the individual soul, was Brahman itself. (*Brahma Satyam jagan mithya, jiva brahmaiva naparah*). Thus, the basis of his whole philosophy was a mystical denial of objective reality of the material world.

Sankara denied the dualism of the individual human soul (jivatma) and the universal soul (paramatma), the dualism of spirit and matter. Individual soul and the phenomenal world had, in his view, no reality apart from Brahman which was without a second. In his commentary on the first chapter of the Brahma Sutra, Sankara defined Brahman as follows: "That which is the cause of all the elements, that because of which they exist, and that in which they ultimately merge, is the Brahman. Brahman is without a beginning. It is without an end. It creates pure knowledge and true bliss. Only the Brahman exists, nothing else. The Brahman is the only truth."

If nothing other than Brahman existed, if only Brahman was the truth, what then was this world? What were the phenomena of our perception, the facts of life we experienced day in and day out?

In the introduction to his commentary on the Brahma Sutra, Sankara explained: "Subject and object—the self and the non-self—are so radically opposed to each other in motion and in practical life that it is impossible to mistake the one for the other. Yet, we find that the mistake is universal and we can never trace it to its source; for, in our common life we cannot do without this initial error." "When we say, for example, 'I am lean' or 'I am blind' or ' I feel,' we identify the self (atman or soul) with the non-self, *i.e.* the body, the senses and the mind. We confound the subject with its own object. The soul is erroneously identified with a finite body and mind. The 'I' or the ego is not, therefore, the real self, because it is limited by the conditions of the body and the sense. But, the body is like any other material object—merely an appearance. If this is admitted, then the only reality that remains is the soul which is nothing but the ultimate Brahman."

Many modern scholars are of the view that such a doctrine has little in common with the teachings of the Upanishads, the basic tenets of which Sankara was supposed to have elucidated. Some have even alleged that in some instances the original meanings were altered, modified and even distorted by Sankara. For example, Surendranath Dasgupta has remarked: "The main thesis of Sankara consists of the view that Brahma alone is the ultimate reality, while everything else is false. He was interested in proving that this philosophy was preached in the Upanishads, but in the Upanishads there are many passages which are clearly of theistic and dualistic support and no amount of linguistic trickery could convincingly show that these could yield a meaning which would support Sankara's thesis."[2]

"This illusion theory," observed Monier Williams, "now so popular among Indian philosophers, receives little countenance in the Upanishads, being imported from Buddhism."[3]

"The Upanishads, as we have seen," wrote Radhakrishnan, "do not yield any consistent view of the universe. Their authors were many, and not all of them belonged to the same period, and it is doubtful whether they all intended to set forth a single view of the universe; but Sankara insists on interpreting the Upanishads in a single coherent manner. According to him, the knowledge of Brahman which we gain from the Upanishads must be uniform throughout and without contradiction."[4]

In fact, even the Vedanta of Badarayana insisted on the reality of the world. For instance, the 28th sutra of the second chapter of the second section of the Brahma Sutra explicitly stated: "Not unreality, because of perception." And the idealist Hindu philosopher, Vijnana Bhikshu (sixteenth century A.D.), in his commentary on the Samkhya Sutra (1.22) wrote thus about the Brahma Sutra: "There is not a single Brahma Sutra in which our bondage is declared to be a mere deception. As to the novel theory of Maya propounded by persons calling themselves Vedantists, it is only a species of the Vijnanavada (of the Buddhists). That is why

[2] *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 2.
[3] Monier Williams: *Indian Wisdom*, p. 118.
[4] *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 467-68.

some writers criticising the tenets of Advaita Vedanta went to the extent of calling Sankara a disguised Buddhist (Prachchanna Buddha)."

It cannot be denied that Sankara's Advaita was very similar to the doctrine of Buddhist Vijnanavadins who also maintained that the phenomenal world was unreal, that all experience, whether in the form of cognition or in the form of the subject, the object and the means of congitions, was mental in character and that, therefore, the forms of objects of our knowledge were determined by cognition which was self-contained and not given by the reality of the external world. Sankara had to refute the arguments of the Vijnanavadins, too, and in the process he had to refute his own dogma !

His reply to the Vijnanavadins was as follows: "To this we, the Vedantins, make the following reply. It is wrong to hold that the external world does not exist; for we are aware that corresponding to our ideas our perceptions point out to us external things like pillars and wells. Nobody will listen to a man who, while he is enjoying his dinner, says that he is neither eating anything nor having any satisfaction out of it. Let the Buddha arbitrarily explain that what he means by saying that there is no object is that there is no consciousness of object apart from the act of consciousness. But the truth is that consciousness itself points out to us what we are aware of in perception. The Buddhas themselves tacitly acknowledge this fact when they say that the internal object of cognition appears 'like something external.' How can there by something 'like external' if there is really nothing external? Is is possible that Vishnumitra should ever appear like the son of a barren mother? Again, if there are no external objects how can the ideas have the form of objects ? And, if the ideas have the forms of the objects, does it mean that forthwith the objects, whose forms the ideas have, are all reduced to these forms only? The truth is that objects are apprehended as external and distinct from ideas; and therefore the invariable concomittance of the idea and the object should be construed as the expression of the causal connection between them and not as that of identity."[6]

[6]Sankara's Commentary on the *Brahma Sutra, Adhyaya II*, Part II, translated by Vinayak Hari, pp. 327-28.

Sankara found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand, he had to counter the Sunyavada of the idealist Buddhists who declared that nothing but consciousness was real, and, on the other hand, he had to prove that only Brahman or pure consciousness was real and that everything else was unreal (which was exactly the position of Sunyavada). Similarly, he had to defend the rishis of the Upanishads and Badarayana, the author of the Brahma Sutra, who had said that the whole world was Brahman (*Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahma*); and yet, he had to show that the world, with all its animate and inanimate objects, was only an illusion and not Brahman.

Sankara made a bold bid to solve this riddle in the following manner: "This distinction may remain from the phenomenal point of view, even though we accept the Brahman as the cause of the world. Modifications of the sea, such as waves, foam and bubbles are not different from the water and yet they do not pass over into each other; they are all related to each other, inasmuch as all of them are in essence water only, and yet they are distinct from each other. Even so, the subjects and the objects may remain distinct without passing into one another, and yet be non-different from the Brahman. The distinction we allowed to exist between the subjects, along with akasa and other things, are included in the world which is non-distinct from its cause, namely: the Brahman. The effect cannot exist, in other words, apart from and in the absence of the cause".[6]

Sankara started with the Upanishadic teaching that the individual jiva was identical with Brahman. But, he found an apparent contradiction which could be solved only if it was held that jiva was a mere appearance and not reality. So, Sankara maintained that it was Brahman that appeared as the jiva and the world. The diverse phenomena in nature, the differences between "you" and "I," all these did not truly exist. In other words, the ultimate reality, *i.e.*, Brahman, and the individual self were one and the same. But, then, how did they appear different? How did it appear that the individual soul and the world existed? Sankara

[6]*Ibid.*, 1-13, p. 247.

solved this contradiction by saying that it was only an illusion, Maya. Caught in the coils of Maya, the individual souls and the world around them assumed an appearance of reality. This illusion, Maya or Adhyasa, was due to absence of knowledge (avidya). It was because of avidya that we saw diversity where there was unity; plurality and duality where there was only one without a second. Sankara, at the same time, assumed Maya to be the sakti (power) of Brahman, although Brahman was said to be devoid of all qualities, attributless (nirguna). This power was not "being," for, only the Brahman was being. Nor could it be called non-being either, because it produced the appearance of the world. In this sense, Maya was the "material cause" of the world because it was due to Maya that the material world seemed to exist.

Monier Williams explained Sankara's position as follows:

> "How, indeed, can it be denied that external things exist, when we see them before our eyes and feel them at every instant? But, how, on the other hand, can it be maintained that an impure world is the manifestation of a pure spiritual essence? To avoid this difficulty, the Supreme Spirit is represented as ignoring Himself by a sort of self-imposed ignorance, in order to draw out from Himself for His own amusement the separate individuated souls and various appearances, which, although really parts of his own essence, contribute to the apparent phenomena of the universe. Hence, the external world, the living souls of individual men, and even Iswara, the personal God, are all described as created by a power which the Vedantist is obliged, for want of a better solution of his difficulty, to call avidya, generally translated 'ignorance,' but perhaps better rendered by 'false knowledge' or 'false notion.'"[7]

In his commentary on Gaudapada's Karika, Sankara wrote that, when a piece of rope appeared as a snake, it was merely a false imposition (Adhyasa). The illusory appearance of the snake did not bring a real snake into existence. The snake was proved to be non-existent, once right knowledge was attained. It was a

[7]Monier Williams: *Indian Wisdom*, p. 118.

mere illusion, Maya or Adhyasa: and the rope-snake had no existence at all. Sankara argued that in the same way we took Brahman to be the world of form and name.

Sankara was faced with the following objection raised by his opponents: "If Brahman alone is real, how can the Vedanta passages, which are then presumably false, lead one to the knowledge of the identity of the jiva and Brahman? No one dies on account of being bitten by the illusory snake which appears on a rope; nor is anybody seen using the water in a mirage for the purpose of drinking or bathing."

Sankara's reply was as follows: "We do see that death occurs sometimes as a consequence of the mere suspicion that a venomous snake has bitten. And the snake-bite and drinking of water in a dream, from the viewpoint of the dreamer himself, are real so long as the dream lasts. Nay, even after the dream is over, and the events of the dream are contradicted by the waking life and seen to be false, the knowledge about them as events in the dream persists in the waking life also without being contradicted."[8]

Sankara pursued the rope-snake argument still further. It was true that only the rope was real, and not the snake. But, could it be asserted, he asked, that the snake did not exist at all? No, because something in the form of a snake was observed. And an object which did not exist could not be perceived. Therefore, it was neither real nor unreal. It was indefinable (anirvachaniya). The snake did exist as the snake (though as an illusion), so long as the observer had no knowledge. When real knowledge dawned on the observer, the feeling of seeing a snake disappeared and only the rope remained. The condition of the world was analogous. The world was neither real nor unreal. With the attainment of knowledge alone would it become clear that the world was dependent on Brahman which was the Truth, the only Reality.

The existence of the snake, however, was dependent on the rope, but not the reverse. In like manner, said Sankara, the world was dependent on Brahman and it could not exist without Brahman. But, Brahman did not depend on the world for its reality, because it alone had independent existence.

[8] *Brahma Sutra* 1-14, Vol. II, Date's Translation, p. 251.

Sankara explained this with another example. The man who created an illusion himself was not under any delusion. The magician dropped a coin in a hat, and showed hundreds of coins coming out of it in an instant. Only the spectators were deceived by the illusion. Ignorance prevented the realisation of truth, but once a person attained true knowledge, he could not be deluded. He would see only one coin in the hat, and not many. So, Sankara argued: "As a magician himself is not affected at any time—past, present or future — by the magic conjured up by himself, it being unreal, so also the Supreme Self is not affected by this world which is a delusion. As a dreamer, remaining the same under all conditions, is not affected by the delusion of dreaming which does not persist in him during the states of wakefulness and sleep, so also the witness of the three states who ever remains the same is not touched by the three variable states. This appearance of the Supreme Self in identity with the three states is a mere superimposition, as in the case of the rope appearing as a snake, etc. With regard to this, it is said by the teacher Gaudapada versed in the traditional views of Vedanta: 'When the individual sleeping under the influence of beginningless Maya is awakened, then he realizes the birthless, sleepless, dreamless, non-dual (turiya).' "[9]

Thus, though illusion (Maya) was an integral aspect of Brahman, the latter was not affected by it. On the contrary, from its standpoint, Maya was *tuccha* (negligible). The question of existence or non-existence did not arise. Yet, the people, governed by avidya, perceived numerous worldly objects in the place of Brahman. For them, Maya was real. It appeared as the very life of the world. When, however, the veil of ignorance was lifted, realisation would come that Brahman alone was the truth.

In the Atma Bodha, a work of Sankara, we find: "The body and the like are the creations of ignorance. They are as impermanent as bubbles. So with the help of knowledge, realise that 'I am pure Brahman.' " This advice is given in his Viveka Chudamani also: "By discerning the eternal and the temporary objects, realise that Brahman is the only truth and that the world is an illusion."

[9] *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* of Sankaracharya, Tr. Gambhirananda, p. 318.

As the jiva or individual soul was the same as Brahman, it was self-illumined, infinite and free, just as Brahman. Its limitations were due to the upadhis or conditions which appeared through avidya. Remove the avidya through vidya (knowledge), and at once the apparent duality of the jiva and Brahman disappears, the former no longer retaining a separate or different existence, being seen in its true nature, *i.e.*, Brahman.

Thus, according to Sankara, the phenomenal world was unreal. It was only an appearance. But the appearance was real. Like the illusion of snake in the rope, there was the illusion of the phenomenal world in Brahman, the Universal Soul. Of course, there was a difference between the illusion of the phenomenal world in Brahman and that of a snake in the rope. The latter was pure illusion — *prathibhasiki satta*; for, on the wordly plane itself, the existence of the snake in the rope could be proved to be false. But, the former was, strictly speaking, not an illusion on the wordly plane. The world of appearance, Sankara admitted, was no illusion but real from the standpoint of the worldly plane. It was *vyavahariki satta*, *i.e.*, real in the practical sense. Nevertheless, from the ultimate standpoint in the paramarthika or real sense, it was unreal and an illusion. The phenomenal world was the creation of avidya. No sooner did the individual jiva realise that it itself was Brahman than the illusion of the world disappeared. Therefore, remove the avidya (ignorance) through vidya or true knowledge of Advaita, and lo! the world disappears!

In sum, this was Sankara's famous Mayavada: From the standpoint of *paramarthika satta* or Brahman, Maya was *tuccha* (negligible); from the standpoint of logic, it was *anirvachaniya* (inexplicable); but, from the standpoint of common experience, the same Maya was *vastava*, real.

As long as man was caught in the magical power of Maya, said Sankara, he was ignorant of the real nature of things. He believed the world to be real, a creation of God. But, when he attained knowledge, he realised that nothing was actually created, and that the jiva itself was Brahman. Sankara wrote: "From two different standpoints Brahman may be conditioned and unconditioned at the same time. From the standpoint of the liberation of the soul he is

unconditioned; from that of one in bondage Brahman appears to be the cause of the universe, endowed with omniscience and with other attributes."

Sankara's Advaita, thus, had two contradictory viewpoints within it. The first approach was in regard to Absolute Truth (paramarthika). The second concerned itself with the worldly and the practical (vyavaharika). The former was meant for the intellectual *elite*, who belonged to the upper classes, while the latter was for the unenlightened common people.

According to Sankara, Advaita Vedanta was the only path to the realisation of Brahman. One must try to realise the absolute identity of the human soul and the Supreme Being, the unconditioned, attributeless Brahman, the only Truth. Jnana or the cognition of Reality was the means to attain identity with Brahman. Bhakti and karma were only steps to bring about purity of mind and to take the aspirant nearer to the goal and were ancillary to jnana. The senses and the mind must be brought under control, all earthly attachments must be given up and the illusory nature of all mundane life must be understood, if one wanted to ascend to that consciousness which constituted true knowledge.

Knowledge could be attained through viveka, the right discrimination between the real and the unreal. Sankara's theory of knowledge also was idealistic in the extreme. Real knowledge of the world was impossible, he asserted. The absolute spiritual beginning of the world could not be known. Truth could be approached and realised only through intuition or in a state of ecstatic consciousness. In the Viveka Chudamani, he stated: "Deliverance is not achieved by repeating the word Brahman, but by directly experiencing Brahman."

One of the basic characteristics of feudalism, whose ideological interests were expressed by Sankara, was its unchanging and rigidly repetitive process of production. This was reflected in the ideological sphere as a refusal to recognise the reality of changes and the rise of new elements in life. Sankara's philosophy expressed this tendency. The pure, qualityless absolute Brahman of Sankara's concept stood beyond all changes and transformations. It was static, rigid and motionless. It was the only Reality. There was nothing but Brahman.

But, if Brahman was the only Truth, and if all phenomena, all objects including human beings, were Brahman, would it be wrong to conclude that all men must be recognised as equals? Was not the same Brahman manifested in a brahmin and in a sudra? What then could be the justification of the caste-differences and social inequalities of feudal society? Sankara realised that the logic of such arguments could lead people in an unwelcome direction. And, to offset this dangerous possibility, he laid down the dictum that only those who were high-born could realise the non-difference of the atman and Brahman. Needless to say, the study of the Vedas and the Upanishads remained exclusively the privilege of the "high-born" upper classes, the enlightened few under feudalism. Sankara said that a sudra should be considered incapable of studying and understanding the Vedas even though he might be physically sound and had a desire to learn. Why? A sudra was unfit simply because he was not a "twice-born" (dwija), *i.e.* a brahmin! A sudra was not entitled to undergo the unpanyana ceremony which was regarded as the necessary condition for a study of the Vedas. Sankara quoted Sastras and Srutis to justify his stand: "We find, however, explicit statements regarding these things in Gautama Dharma Sastra. 'The ears of the sudra who hears the Vedas are to be filled with molten lead and lac.' (12.4.) 'If he utters a Vedic word, his tongue should be cut, etc.' (13.5.6.) 'The twice-born alone are entitled to study sacrifice and to the receiving or giving of the gifts.' (10.1.) 'Knowledge should not be imparted to the sudra.' (Manu. 4.80.)" And then Sankara concludes: "From the prohibition to hear the Vedas follows the prohibition to study and to know their meaning. For how will one know the meaning without study and how again will one study without hearing what he studies?"[10]

Thus, with all his learning and vision, Sankara supported the caste system which was necessary for the upper classes of the feudal society. According to him, the division of society between the rich and the poor, between the higher castes and the lower castes, was predestined and so there was no question of changing it.

[10]*Brahma Sutras*, 1. 3. 34-8.

"A thinker", wrote Radhakrishnan, "who is reaching forward to a larger conception of truth does not break entirely from the common beliefs of his age. Though the efficiency of caste institutions has ceased to be vital for Sankara, he allows room for belief in it. The traditional theory that birth in a particular caste is not a matter of change, but is the necessary consequence of conduct in a former existence, inclines Sankara to accept the claim of the upper classes, gods, and rishis for the exclusive right to study the Veda."[11]

However, these high-born folk had to depend on the labour of the low-born for the satisfaction of their physical cravings and comforts in this world. So, it was not laid down that paddy and other articles of food, produced by sudras, were to be treated as untouchable or as illusory. Indeed, the high-born had a birth-right to the enjoyment of all luxuries and privileges. Sankara's advice to them was that they should lead normal family lives (grihasthasrama) as prescribed in the Upanishads, until such time as they realised the non-dual nature of the atman and Brahman. Then, passing their wealth and property on to their children or other heirs and renouncing all wordly ties, they had to take to sannyasa, asceticism. If they followed this path, salvation was assured to them. In the vyavaharika sense, let them oppress the people and enjoy a vyavaharika life of ease! And in the paramarthika sense, well, neither the oppressor nor the oppressed existed!

Thus, Sankara who opposed the performance of certain duties and rites as laid down by the Mimamsa, himself prescribed certain new karmas and codes of living. He insisted that brahmins should observe the obligations of caste and of the four asramas or stages of life. He who propounded the Advaita doctrine of the one and only Reality, the infinite, formless and attributeless Brahman, also justified the worship of idols and of finite gods. He himself composed hymns in praise of numerous gods and goddesses. Such apparent contradictions and paradoxes are traceable to Sankara's efforts to justify the dominant feudal social relations and the caste system of his time. Not only the strength of Sankara's Advaita but also its weaknesses are to be found in their roots in Indian feudalism.

[11]Radhakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 616.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

VISISHTADVAITA AND DVAITA

SANKARA'S Advaita with its emphasis on non-dual monism and his doctrine of Maya roused, in the subsequent period, vehement opposition even from idealist Hindu philosophers. The Vaishnavites, the Bhagavathas, the Pancharathras, the Saivas and other sects joined in the attack. The great philosopher Bhaskara, who is said to have flourished before the tenth century A.D., pointed out that Sankara's argument against those who believed in the reality of the world might be adduced against Sankara himself. Bhaskara held that Sankara's Advaita was nothing but a new version of the nihilism of the Mahayana Buddhists. According to him, the world existed not by Maya, but as a real modification of Brahman which was only the material and instrumental cause of the individual souls and the universe.

Nathamuni, author of the Nyayatattva and Yoga Rahasya, and his grandson Yamunacharya, otherwise known as Alavandar (eleventh century A.D.), were some of the other opponets of Sankara. But, by far the greatest of them were Ramanuja and Madhva. Ramanuja started as a follower of Nathamuni and Yamunacharya, but later he founded his own independent school of idealist philosophy known as the Visishtadvaita.

Ramanuja was born about the middle of the eleventh century A.D. at Sriperuputhur near Kancheepuram in South India. Unlike Sankara, he enjoyed a long life and died in A.D. 1137. In his childhood, he came in contact with the Vaishnavite saints known as the Alvars, and studied the Vedas, the Upanishads and other religious and philosophical texts under their guidance. Among his great works, the Sree Bhashya, which was a commentary on the Brahma Sutra, has been regarded as the most important. Professor A.B. Keith has expressed the view that, of all the commentaries on the Brahma Sutra, the Sree Bhashya of Ramanuja is the most outstanding. His other important works are the Bhagavad Gita Bhashya, the Vedanta Samgraha, the Vedantadeepa, the Nithya-

grantha and Vedantasara. Through these works, Ramanuja expounded the fundamental propositions of his philosophical system called the Visishtadvaita.

Like Sankara, Ramanuja also was an exponent of Advaita (Non-Dualism). He considered the eternal and blissful Brahman as the highest reality. But, his Advaita was different from Sankara's; for, the world in his view was not an illusion. According to him, Brahman, the individual souls and the physical world were all real and distinct from one another. Brahman was the soul of the individual souls and the physical world. Thus, the non-living, insentient matter (achit) and the living, conscious, finite soul (chit), though different from Brahman, were not independent of Him but were sustained and controlled by Him. The absolute, infinite Brahman contained in Himself all the material objects as well as all the finite souls in the world. In other words, both chit and achit were integral parts of Brahman. Visishtadvaita meant the unity (advaita) of the one infinite Brahman with its own distinct, finite parts (visishta). This concept was different from Sankara's doctrine of non-dualism, of the unity between Brahman and the atman. Ramanuja held that the jivatma (individual soul), although united with the Paramatma (Universal Soul, *i.e.*, Brahman), had a distinct and separate existence. True, the individual soul formed part of Brahman. But, then, the part could not be equated with the whole. In other words, there was duality within unity.

The Brahman of Sankara was, moreover, devoid of any special guna or quality. It was Nirguna Brahman. On the contrary, Ramanuja's Brahman was not only omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, but possessed such attributes as wisdom, power, auspiciousness, effulgence and compassion. Ramanuja defined Brahman as the Most High. He was not tainted by the evils of the world as He stood distinct from the universe and all human beings.

Ramanuja held, unlike Sankara, that the omnipotent God had created the world out of Himself. He did it like a spider weaving a web from its own body. The soul, according to him, was an extremely minute particle which could enter into lifeless or unconscious matter. This was how the soul came to exist within a body. By nature, the soul was eternal, conscious and pure. It,

however, experienced sorrow and joy when it combined with lifeless matter. It was karma, the ordained will, that caused sorrows and joys. Consciousness and vitality were inseparable aspects of the soul; but, within the body, these aspects of the soul were limited and conditioned by the sense objects and the material physical, body. The soul and the body, both creations of Brahman, became connected as a result of karma. Every soul received the particular body that it deserved, depending on karma.

The whole universe was filled with the radiance of Brahman. Just as the fire remaining in one place spreads its light all around, "all the worlds are the manifestations of the power of the Brahman." He pervaded the whole cosmos, animate and inanimate matter. It was all a manifestation of God in a plurality of names and forms. Just as all objects made of gold contained gold, even so all creations contained God within them and depended on Him for their existence.

Ramanuja rejected both the concept of philosophical materialism which considered the material world with its complex relations as the only reality, and that of methaphysical idealism which denied any reality outside the world of consciousness. He recognised Brahman as the Highest Reality, but, unlike Sankara, he held that the world with its diversity of forms was as real as the Absolute Brahman, though it was dependent on the latter. Brahman was absolutely free and devoid of all imperfections while worldly objects and human souls had no such perfection. Material objects had no consciousness and no vitality, and the soul was subject to sorrow and ignorance. In other words, the worlds of inorganic matter and individual souls were imperfect and limited, though they were by no means illusory.

Ramanuja's approach was, thus, opposed to the absolute monism of Sankara. In particular, Sankara's doctrine of Maya was vehemently criticised by him. All knowledge, he said, was knowledge of reality. And reality could not be a delusion of the mind. The rope might be mistaken for a snake. But, the snake could not be just dismissed as unreal. For, the snake and the rope were both made of basic elements like water, earth, fire, etc. When the rope was seen as a snake, we were in fact seeing these basic elements which were real. Brahman was real and, therefore, the world based on Him was also real.

Criticising Sankara's snake-rope theory, Ramanuja wrote: "In the case of the snake-rope, there arises a cognition of non-existence in connection with the given place and time; hence there is contradiction, one judgment sublates the other and the sublated cognition comes to an end. But the circumstance of something which is seen at one time and in one place not persisting at another time and in another place is not observed to be invariably accompanied by falsehood, and hence mere non-persistence of this kind does not constitute a reason for unreality. To say, on the other hand, that what is, is real, because it persists, is to prove what is proved already, and requires no further proof.

"Hence mere Being does not alone constitute reality. And as the distinction between consciousness and its objects—which rests just on this relation of object and that for which the object is—is proved by perception, the assertion that only consciousness has real existence is also disposed of."[1]

The subject and the object, the conscious and the non-conscious, were real and eternal, and permanent relations existed between them. These relationships also were real. Brahman was manifested through these relationships. The ultimate unity of Ramanuja's concept was expressed in a plurality of forms. Brahman was the arbiter and controller. Just as the human body was regulated and controlled by the atman within, even so the functions and working of the whole world, nature, all organic and non-organic objects, were controlled by Brahman. Without him, man and nature ceased to exist.

The non-conscious, again, was subject to changes. The soul also underwent changes as a result of physical changes. But Brahman was changeless, beyond all vicissitudes in nature and in human life. Ramanuja described Him as "Truth of all truths."

No insoluble contradiction existed between the knower and the known, between knowledge and reality, in Ramanuja's view. He did not, however, believe that knowledge of reality could be complete. Only certain aspects of reality could be grasped, others

[1] *Vedanta Sutra*, I.1.1. *Ramanuja's Sree Bhashya*, translated by George Thibaut.

remaining beyond cognition. All knowledge encompassed only certain particular aspects of reality and, as such, until complete reality was grasped, knowledge was bound to be imperfect. And, in order to attain perfect knowledge, the knower, the seeker after truth, must free himself from all attachments. Perfect and complete knowledge could be acquired, according to Ramanuja, only when the soul achieved liberation.

Ramanuja stressed the need for bhakti, devotion to God. He held that the soul was limited and tied down by the physical body and karma. Salvation signified the freeing of the soul from these ties. According to Ramanuja, there were three paths to salvation —karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga (the path of action, the path of knowledge and the path of devotion). He was an advocate primarily of the bhakti path. Karma made bhakti purer, and jnana made it deeper and as such these were aids to the practice of bhakti yoga. Bhakti implied seven factors: viveka (discrimination), vimoha (freedom), abhyasa (practice), kriya (work), kalyana (auspiciousness), anavasada (absence of weakness) and anuddharsha (absence of excessive merriment).

The ultimate aim of the jeevatman was communion with Brahman. Ramanuja warned, therefore, that failure to distinguish between the body and the world would lead one to a life of gross indulgence in the pleasures of material life. Man in his ignorance believed that the body represented the person, that the birth of the body was the beginning, and death the end of existence. This was the source of all human passions, emotions and desires. When, however, realisation dawned in man's mind that the soul was distinct from the material world and the physical body, that it was part of Brahman, then he would get release from all worldly unhappiness and trials.

Knowledge, said Ramanuja, could not be attained by learning Vedic sutras and Upanishadic verses by rote and chanting them. True knowledge was attainable only through devotion to God. Nishkama karma (performance of one's duty without consideration for the results, without subjective desires) was the beginning of true bhakti. Neither spiritual satisfaction nor material gain should be the purpose of karma. The mind should have no such

ulterior purpose in fulfilling one's karma. In this manner, Ramanuja showed how karma yoga became the path to jnana yoga. Jnana or knowledge enabled absolute self-conquest and self-surrender to the will of God. Ramanuja's concept of bhakti was not blind faith, but costant meditation on God based on the highest knowledge and nishkama karma. It spurred the soul to attain communion with Brahman.

The philosophy of Ramanuja, with its emphasis on a life of devotion, stands in striking contrast to the philosophical teachings of Sankara with their rigidity and abstract erudition. In Radhakrishnan's words: "Sankara's Advaita, though a masterpiece of intellect, cannot inspire religious piety. His Absolute cannot kindle passionate love and adoration in the soul." Ramanuja's doctrine had a direct and instant impact on the people of the period. Those who were struck with awe by the brilliant yet involved reasonings of the great Sankara saw something simpler and more appealing in Ramanuja's teachings. Perhaps, this was due to the fact that Ramanuja "tried his best to reconcile the demands of religious feelings with the claims of logical thinking."[2]

Ramanuja too formulated his doctrines within the bounds of feudalism. Yet, his attitude towards the caste system was not so rigid and dogmatic as that of Sankara. He proclaimed that bhakti transcended all caste distinctions, and he stood for equality in the worship of God. According to him, all worshippers of Vishnu were equal, because all people—high and low—were manifestations of Brahman. He had no hestiation even to recognise the Tiru Vaymoli of Tiruppan Alwar, a devotee belonging to an untouchable caste, as the Veda of the Vaishnavas. Yet, he found it difficult to break the caste rules which divided the Vaishnavas socially. To get over this difficulty, a rule was made to the effect that the devotees should take their meals separately and pray together. Even this restriction was wiped out by the religious movement unleashed by his disciples. Ramanuja went to the extent of saying that the practice of devotion to God did not, in the final analysis, require even a priestly class. These factors were responsible for the greater

[2]Dr. Radhakrishnan: *History of Indian Philosophy*.

popularity of Ramanuja's teachings in the Middle Ages, in contrast to the cold reception accorded to Sankara's doctrines which were too abstract to have any popular appeal and attracted only a small intellectual *elite* of the upper stratum of society.

Two hundred years after Ramanuja, his teachings provided the philosophical basis for the popular Bhakti movement which started under Ramananda's leadership. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

The Dvaita of Madhva: Madhva, the third of the celebrated philosophers of the later Vedanta, was born in the beginning of the thirteenth century in a small village near Udipi in the Karnataka area, as the son of a pious brahmin. He was brought up in the Advaita school of thought, but Sankara and his philosophy did not hold his allegiance for long. Gradually, he began to preach his own system of philosophy, known as Dvaita Siddhanta (Dualism), which was different from both the Advaita of Sankara and the Visishtadvaita of Ramanuja. He toured many parts of India preaching his philosophy and combating rival schools of thought, especially Sankara's Advaita. He wrote about 37 books in all, the most important being his commentaries on the Brahma Sutra and on the Bhagavad Gita and a book called Anuvyakhyana. He had many learned disciples like Jayatirtha and Padmanabha-tirtha. Some of them wrote excellent annotations to Madhva's works, too.

The central teachings of the Dvaita Siddhanta consisted of the uccpetance of the world's reality and of the distinction between the jeevatman and Brahman. The jeevatman, Brahman and the world were the three eternal realities. All the three had independent existence. Refuting Sankara's doctrine, he argued that if Brahman and the jeevatman were one and the same, there could be no meaning in anybody seeking to realise Brahman because the seeker himself was Brahman. According to Madhva, Brahman was the object of realisation precisely because the jeevatman within man was distinct from Brahman. Knowledge presupposed a subject and an object. Without a knower (subject) and the known (object), there could be no knowledge. In other words, knowledge was subject-object relationship.

How could there be an identity between the individual human soul which was finite, imperfect, unhappy and ignorant, and the Universal Spirit—infinite, perfect, happy and omniscient? According to Sankara, there was no contradiction in this assumption because the infinite Brahman was the one and only reality that existed; and it was merely due to ignorance of the real nature of this oneness that the individual became subject to misery, pain and imperfection. "But, whose ignorance?" asked Madhva. Ignorance on the part of the finite individual was ignorance on the part of the infinite soul as well, because of their identity; which meant accusing Brahman of ignorance. Conversely, if ignorance could not affect the Absolute Soul, it would not affect the individual soul, either. Thus, the assumption of ignorance itself involved a differentiation between the infinite and the finite. If the identity of the two was upheld, the finite would become the infinite or Absolute, resulting in the denial of the omniscience of the Absolute. Both were real, but Madhva said there was an important difference between the two. While the Supreme Being was an independent reality, the jeevatman was dependent on Him.

Without the acceptance of the reality of the object, there could be no cognition of the truth of an idea, said Madhva. So, just as Brahman was real, the animate (chetana) and inanimate (achetana) beings were real, and the difference between them also was real. Madhva asserted that the world was not illusory and had a real existence in space and time. He defined philosophy as the determination of things as they were (*tatvanirnaya*).

According to Madhva, there were three sources of knowledge—perception (pratyaksha), inference (anumana) and scripture (agama). Pratyaksha was quite capable of giving the subject a true knowledge of external reality. But, how could one be sure that the knowledge derived by sense perception was true knowledge? When a rope was mistaken for a snake, how could one differentiate between true knowledge and false knowledge? Madhva suggested that one should go near the object and verify one's knowledge from one's own experience. Experience was the most secure foundation of knowledge and the sole criterion of truth. When one went nearer the object and perceived a rope and not a snake, one's earlier know-

ledge (illusion) of the snake was corrected. In other words, the earlier knowledge was sublated by the later knowledge. If it was not sublated or falsified by experience, it must be conceived as true knowledge. Naga Raja Sarma explained the views of Madhva as follows:

> "The illusions of silver-appearance and snake-appearance can easily be explained as being due to misinterpretation of sensory data. No one can question the reality of the sensory data themselves. They are as real as the Absolute of the Absolutists. Only they are erroneously interpreted. It is seen subsequently, when the factors that disturb the normality of the sense-object rapproachement are got rid of by a closer scrutiny, that there had occurred an error of interpretation. An analsysis of perceptual illusions is bound to demonstrate the existence of a realistic residue in all of them, and the analogy at any rate, is hardly adequate to deprive the universe of its inalienable birthright of reality."[3]

The objects existed in space and time independently of the human mind. They existed whether there was a perceiving mind or not. They impressed themselves on the sense of perception and generated knowledge. Here, Madhva insisted that for true knowledge to be obtained, the object, the sense organ and the perceiving mind (or sakti as he called it) should be without defects. When the sense organs or the objects were defective, knowledge of the objects might prove to be false. To a person with a jaundiced eye, all the objects appeared to be yellow in colour. When the object was not clear due to insufficiency of light or its being too far away, it might be mistaken for something else. A rope in this manner might appear to be a snake. Similarly, when one's mind became preoccupied, one was not aware of the object. Thus, true knowledge, according to Madhva, was the knowledge obtained by a defectless perceiving mind. Madhva stated further that occasional errors did not invalidate the effectiveness of sense perception. Errors occurred as a result of maladjustments, and

[3]R. Naga Raja Sarma: *Reign of Realism*, p. 576.

they only proved the general validity of sense knowledge. Such a fearless defence of the general validity of perceptual knowledge as opposed to Sankara's doctrine of Maya proclaimed the materialist position of Madhva in this respect, which clearly arose from his acceptance of an objective, real world existing outside the human mind. In Tattvodyota, he wrote:

> "Sense knowledge is its own standard of truth. It cannot be stultified by inference or scripture. The moon's limited size and such other defective perceptions are accountable as being due to distance and other abnormal conditions. But, so far as the most vigorous tests could go, there is nothing to warrant a wholesale rejection of the evidence of sense perception, regarding the existence of a world outside our minds."[4]

Madhva held that all objects in the world originated from the evolutionary changes in nature. Even the human bodies arose from prakriti. Also, prakriti was the source of the three basic qualities of satva, rajas and tamas. All this had obvious kinship with Samkhya, a doctrine abhorred by Sankara.

Madhva's prakriti, however, functioned under the guidance of Brahman, personified as Vishnu. To him, Vishnu was the highest principle, the ultimate cause of creation, the Supreme Being who bestowed reality on the world. The individual souls and the physical world were all under His sway. Beyond all blemishes and limitations, full of auspicious attributes, Almighty Vishnu had absolute power over everything. Meditating on Him, the human soul attained everlasting salvation. And one could liberate oneself from earthly ties only through the grace of God. This was the true basis of all karma and morality. Any person who attained salvation through the grace of God Vishnu could realise Brahman in himself. This was perfect Bliss.

Unlike Sankara who tried his best to justify the caste system and social inequalities, Madhva opposed it to some extent and exhorted his followers to work for the amelioration of social evils so that all people without distinction of caste or creed might be in a

[4]Tr. by N. R. Sharma: *Madhva's Teachings in his own Words*, p. 57.

position to study philosophy and be benefited by it. He believed that not only the brahmins and other higher castes but also the sudras should be permitted to study the Vedas, and that even the untouchable could be devoted to Vishnu.

Nimbarka : Nimbarka, yet another philosopher of the later Vedantic school, belonged to the eleventh century A.D. He also wrote a commentary on the Brahma Sutra. His system consisted of three principles—Brahman, chit (sentient) and achit (insentient). Achit or the inanimate world was again of three kinds: prakriti with its three gunas; aprakrita, that which was not derived from prakriti; and kala or time. All these were real and eternal.

Nimbarka agreed with the Samkhya theory of the universe having emerged from prakriti owing to its gunas, with this difference, however, that the prakriti of his conception was dependent on Brahman and not self-sufficient. Chit or consciousness, he said, was the essence of the human soul. It was non-material and distinct from the body. The elevan organs (the five external organs of sense, the five internal organs of action, and the mind) were the instruments by which the soul perceived, acted on and enjoyed anything. There were countless individual souls in existence, all eternal.

Brahman was the highest reality. He was saguna (having qualities) being full of auspicious atrributes like blissfulness, beauty and tenderness. He was both the efficient cause and the material cause of the world. The jiva and the world evolved out of Brahman who, according to Nimbarka, was not an impersonal Absolute but a personal God. And he identified Brahman with Krishna, the eternal lover of Radha.

Nimbarka's doctrine, called Dvaitadvaita (Dualistic Non-Dualism), laid down that the jiva (enjoyer), jagat (the world enjoyed) and Isvara (God) were three distinct categories. The soul and nature were objective realities, but they depended on God who alone was independent. Thus, the relation between the universe and God was not one of identity, God being distinct from the jiva as well as from the jagat. This did not, however, mean that jiva and jagat were absolutely independent of and unrelated to God; they were dependent on God. They were different and at the same time

non-different from God. Both the difference and non-difference were real. In other words, the jiva and jagat existed distinctly but not independently. That was why this system was called dualistic non-dualism.

Sankara had tried to solve the bhedabheda (difference-*cum*-non-difference) relation between the jiva and Brahman by attributing bheda (difference) to the vyavaharika state, and abheda (non-difference) to the Paramarthika state. But, Nimbarka held that both non-difference and difference were real. The jiva, he said, existed distinctly and yet, at the same time, was dependent on Brahman, just as the sun's ray was at once distinct from the sun and dependent on it. The world, though different from Brahman, was at the same time a transformation of Brahman and, therefore, it was Brahman in essence. Yet, Brahman did not lose Himself in the material world. He remained different from the world of matter.

Why did Brahman create the world, or rather, why did he transform Himself into the world? Nimbarka explained this as God's *leela* (sport). Everything that we witnessed in this world was God's play. One must understand this motive of creation and seek to realise God through bhakti in order to achieve eternal bliss or salvation. But, according to Nimbarka, bhakti was not mere meditation; it was selfless love which required of the devotee a pure and unblemished life.

Vallabha's Suddhadvaita or pure Non-Dualism, undefiled by Maya, was yet another school of the Vedanta. According to Vallabha (fifteenth century), both soul and matter were real manifestations of Brahman. Through these, Brahman revealed His tripartite essense of Existence (sat), Knowledge (chit) and Bliss (ananda) without Himself undergoing any change. The universe came out of Brahman as sparks from fire. Vallabha thought that there was a significant difference between jagat and samsara. Jagat was the real manifestation of Brahman. But samsara, the cycle of births and deaths, existed only on account of ignorance. With the removal of ignorance, samsara also disappeared and only jagat existed as the real manifestation of Brahman.

All these various schools of the Vedanta—Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita, Madhva's Dvaita, Nimbarka's Dvaitadvaita and Vallabha's

Suddhadvaita—recognised Brahman as the ultimate cause of the universe. All of them were idealist systems of philosophy. But they differed fundamentally from the idealist school of thought propounded by Sankara. Indeed, they emerged as a protest against the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara to whom Brahman alone was real. In other words, Advaita was subjective idealism while all other schools of the Vedanta were based on objective idealism. We shall see that, in the context of the changing economic and social conditions of later feudalism, this difference was significant.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

SIVA AND SAKTI

THE Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, which emerged in South India in the thirteenth century, was not a continuation or a development of the old Saivism of the Nayanars. In fact, it marked a definite departure from the old.

Meykander wrote his Sivajnana Bodham in the beginning of the thirteenth century. It was followed by Saiva Semaya-neri written by Thirujnana Sambandhar. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, Umapati Sivacharya wrote his Sivaprakasha. In all these works, which expounded the basic principles of the Saiva Siddhantha philosophy, the influence of Vedanta and other ideas of later feudalism is quite evident.

According to Saiva Siddhantha, there were three realities—Pasu (individual soul), Pasam (bond), and Pati (lord). Pasu existed in Pasa and it could be liberated only by its union with Pati.

Pati, the Lord who was none else than Siva, was the Supreme Reality who possessed eight attributes, *viz.* self-existence, essential purity, intuitive wisdom, infinite intelligence, freedom from all bonds, infinite grace or love, omnipotence and infinite bliss. He was above joy and sorrow. He performed the five functions of creation (srishty), preservation (stithi) and destruction (samhara) of the universe, and obscuration (tirodhana) and liberation (anugraha) of souls.

Sivajnana Siddhiyar defined the soul as follows : "It (soul) is formless (arupa) and all-pervasive (vibhu) but unlike that of acit or matter. Its Vyapaka consists in becoming one with the thing it dwells in for the time being (body or god). Its eternal intelligence and power are eternally concealed by the Pasa (bondage) or Anavamala and hence it is called Pasu."[1]

Anavamala which produced qualities like moha (attachment), mada (egoism), raga (hankering after the unattainable), vishada

[1] K. M. Balasubramaniam: *Special Lectures on Saiva Siddhantha*, Annamalai, 1959, p. 121.

(regret), tapa (pain or separation) and soka (melancholy) pervaded jivas and the real nature of the soul. "Anavamala with its many saktis," observed Sivajnana Siddhiyar, "is one ever pervading through the numberless jivas as the dirt in copper. It binds them from Jnana and Kriya. It also affords them the capacity for experience and it is ever the source of ignorance."[2]

Then, there was Mayamala, distinct from Anavamala. According to the Saiva Siddhantha, Mayamala stood separate from the souls and induced the activity of their ichcha, kriya and jnana saktis, whereas the Anavamala inhered in the souls and eternally deprived them of their natural powers.[3]

The individual soul or Pasu was subjected to the trials and tribulations of the world (samsara), to which it was bound by the Pasa. It was really the eternal and all-pervading consciousness different from the body and the sense organs, but as long as it was bound by Pasa, it mistook itself as finite and as limited in thought and action.

Pasa (meaning rope) consisted of avidya, karma and maya. These were the fetters that bound the soul to samsara. Avidya was the notion of the soul that it was finite, confined to the body and limited in knowledge and power. Karma was the activity of the soul, which united the conscious with the unconscious. Maya was the material cause of the world. The removal of the Pasa was necessary for the soul to become one with Pati. With the attainment of salvation, the soul ceased to have any wordly taint. But, even at that stage, it did not become one with God, the soul and God being different. "Water acquired heat by contact with fire, but not its capacity to burn. Even so, the soul acquires perfection due to grace of the Lord, but does not acquire God's status."

There were also other schools of Saivism, which flourished in the country during the Middle Ages. Some of them survive to this day. There was, for instance, Kashmira Saivism which originated in Kashmir in the eighth or ninth century A.D. It developed as an independent philosophy under the influence of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta which gave a new interpretation to

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Saivism. According to this school, Siva the absolute, infinite consciousness was the only reality, "the one without a second," as the Upanishads put it. Siva manifested as the universe through His wonderful Sakti inherent in Him. Sakti had many aspects such as chit, ananda, ichcha, jnana, kriya and maya. Maya, according to Kashmira Saivism, was neither illusion nor the material cause of the universe. It was that aspect of Sakti by which Siva manifested as the universe. Siva made the world appear as if it was distinct from Him; but in reality there was nothing different from Siva. Knowledge of this reality was essential for salvation.

The individual soul was identical with Siva, but it suffered from various impurities which created limiting conditions and which, therefore, differentiated it from Him. Spiritual discipline was the means to free the soul from impurities for the realisation of the Supreme Truth.

The Saivism of the Lingayats or Vira Saivas was very popular in Karnataka and certain parts of Maharashtra and Andhra. This school was founded by Basava who was the prime minister of Kalacuri Bijjala, king of Kalayani, and who, according to some historians, usurped the throne of the Chalukyas in A.D. 1156. He rejected the authority of the Vedas and the injunctions and prohibitions of the brahmins and founded a new priesthood called the Jangamas. He ridiculed pilgrimages and sacrifices and preached equality of all men and women. He laid more emphasis on social problems than on theology. Kumaraswamiji pointed out that the institution of Vira Saivism was founded by Basava in A.D. 1160, "mainly to make man realise his place in the scheme of the universe, to breathe new spirit into the then decaying religion; to give woman an equality of status and an independent outlook, to abolish caste-distinctions; to encourage occupations and manual labour; and to countenance simplicity of living and singleness of purpose."

According to the Saivites, the world was real, but it was only a theatre for God's play through his Sakti. Just as the potter was the first cause of a pot, his wheel its instrumental cause and clay its material cause, Siva was the first cause, his Sakti the instrumental cause and Maya the material cause of the world. Sakti was an

inherent quality of God, "even as heat is a quality of fire." In Hindu theology, Sakti meant the creative principle or energy. It was considered the female principle as the complement to the male principle. Knowledge (jnana) without action (kriya) was dead knowledge and Siva without Sakti was as powerless as a corpse because He was unable to create or destroy without sakti. Sakti was also known as Durga, Bhuvaneswari, Kali and Bhagavati. Historically, she evolved from the old Mother Goddess who was represented by numerous village goddesses.

Goddesses were not very popular in the patriarchal society of the early Aryans. But, because of the uneven development of Indian society, many elements of primitive communism and tribal beliefs existed side by side with the Varnasrama economy and even the feudal economy of the Middle Ages. The cult of the Mother-goddess had been existing in India from prehistoric times especially in regions which were predominantly agricultural. As Marshall has observed, the village mother goddesses whose names and attributes varied from place to place "held a pre-eminent position among the national deities of the non-Aryan population. This is indicated alike by the popularity of their cults among the primitive tribes, and by the fact that the leading part in their ritual and ceremonies are taken not by Brahmanas but by low caste pariahs—members of some of the old tribes who are supposed to know how to win the ear of the goddess. Some of the pre-Aryan tribes have never really come within the fold of Hinduism and among these tribes the worship of the Mother or Earth Goddess is specially strong."[4]

In the Middle Ages, many non-Aryan agricultural regions came under the domination of feudalism and many primitive tribes were integrated into the Hindu fold. This transformation raised the status of the Mother Goddess on the one hand and, on the other, changed the character of Hinduism itself. The archaeological excavations of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, as has been pointed out by Ehrenfels, have brought out two fundamentally important facts: "(*a*) The predominance of the pre-Aryan element in the

[4]Marshall: *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, London 1931, p. 51.

cultural structure of what we call Hinduism and (*b*) the matriarchal character of this advanced pre-Aryan civilization to which present-day and medieval India owes so many elements, impulses and cultural moulds."[5]

Thus, the pre-Aryan goddess of fertility had a significant revival in the feudal period. The Mother Goddess of the ancient matriarchal system attained a position of honour as the consort of Siva. The goddess Meenakshi of Madurai, for example, had been a rather obscure goddess in olden times but, with the rise of Saivism, she was made into Siva's consort. Bhagavati is still worshipped as a popular goddess in Kerala, as Chamundi is in Mysore. Kanya Kumari (Virgin Goddess) of the temple at the Cape in the southern extremity of India was once considered to be the family deity of the Pandyas.

Frazer observes: "The local shrines, with their associated worship of deified heroes and their appeasing of ghosts and evil-working spirits of the dead by human and blood sacrifices and magic spells, were scattered throughout the villages of India, where the aboriginal primitive ritual was ministered by local sorcerers and priests. As these local shrines became more renowned, they grew in wealth and importance, and became endowed by local chieftains and land owners. The shrines became temples wherein the aboriginal deities were raised to new honour and rank as manifestations or servants of Siva and Vishnu, or of their Saktis (female consorts). From the beginning of the fifth century of our era, when Brahminism was passing into Hinduism, all the gods and deified heroes of India were given Puranic legends until myriads of gods connected one way or another with the Vedic and epic deities appeared and vanished in the kaleidoscopic panorama of the Hindu Pantheon."[6]

Not only the Mother Goddess, but various ghosts and spirits of the dead, deified heroes, and shadows of ancestors continue to be objects of worship. There were even goddesses of plague, smallpox and famine, who could be appeased only by the blood of goats and fowls. In many cases, the worship of the goddesses of diseases

[5]Ehrenfels: *Mother Right in India*, Hyderabad, 1941, p. 1.

[6]R. R. Frazer: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II.

became identified with the cult of Bhagavati, the Mother Goddess. The Bhagavati of Kerala and Mariyamma of Tamilnad were, for example, the goddesses of smallpox; Muttiyamma, the Telugu goddess, and Kali, the most popular goddess of Bengal, came to wear garlands of skulls. Magic, toddy-rituals and blood-sacrifices were performed to win the favour of these goddesses.

With the rise of feudalism, many of the older local shrines, especially those belonging to the upper classes, were converted into Saiva or Vaishnava temples. The local deities began to be invested with the dignity of authentic manifestations of Siva or Vishnu or of their consorts. The linga embraced by the yoni formed the main object of worship in many Hindu temples. Where Buddhist, and later Brahmin, influences were predominant, blood-sacrifices were changed into offerings of flowers and incense, and the local non-brahmin priests were later replaced by brahmin priests. But, "in some well-known temples of South India," as Frazer has pointed out, "the ancient blood rites and drunken orgies are permitted to be revived yearly as a compromise with the brahmin priests acting under the protection of local chieftains, who in return for their patronage and countenance obtained rank as kshatriyas with spurious pedigrees."[7]

In the early agricultural societies, the goddess was the symbol of fertility. But, under feudalism, she became the Supreme Divinity, the mother of the universe. Brahman, the cosmic consciousness, came to be looked upon as a woman, a mother, or a womb. Sakti or the Mother Goddess began to be worshipped as the power or energy of God represented in different female forms. Some of the goddesses were at once amiable and fearful. According to Devi Mahatmya, "the fearful goddess (Chandika), devoted to her devotees, reduces to ashes those who do not worship her and destroys their merits."

When feudalism decayed and the age-old village communities were undermined by the intrusion of commodity production and money-economy during the early days of British rule, Sakti-puja also degenerated and a section of the Sakti worshippers began to

[7]R. R. Frazer: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II.

indulge in all kinds of abominable rituals in the name of Sadhana. Abbe Dubois has given an eye-witness account of this degeneration which prevailed in India in the last decades of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth century. He wrote: "Among the abominable rites practised in India is one which is only too well known; it is called Saktipuja, sakti meaning strength or power. Sometimes, it is the wife of Siva to whom this sacrifice is offered; sometimes they pretend that it is in honour of some invisible power. The ceremony takes place at night with more or less secrecy. The least disgusting of these orgies are those where they confine themselves to eating and drinking everything that the custom of the country forbids, and where men and women, huddled together in indiscriminate confusion, openly and shamelessly violate the commonest laws of decency and modesty."[8]

Yet, some modern writers are of the view that Sakti worship was intended to help the realisation of Brahman. They admit that Sakti worship includes "rituals consisting of apparently sensual and revolting practices, which are responsible for the disrepute in which Tantricism in general and Saktism in particular are usually held in the modern world." But, they assert that "these practices are by no means the characteristic or the most important feature of the Sakti cult. In fact, it has lofty spiritual ideals, its rituals aiming at practical realization of the Vedantic principle of the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul or Brahman, who is none but the Sakti that pervades the entire universe."[9]

[8]Abbe J. A. Dubois: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Vol. I, Oxford 1897, p. 288.

[9]Chintaharan Chakravarthy: *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 408-09.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MONISM—IDEALIST AND MATERIALIST

IN the ancient systems of Indian philosophy, the main controversy was about the origin of the universe. The numerous gods of natural religion could not for long satisfy the enquiring mind of the early Aryans. They indulged in mythological speculations about reality and searched for a God of gods. Monotheism evolved out of polytheism in the development of abstract thought. As Engels pointed out, belief in a single God appeared with the emergence of a single king in the place of a number of tribal chieftains. The ancient peoples thought that just as a single king controlled the affairs of the state and the social and political life of the country, so also a single God controlled the diverse phenomena of nature. Monotheism was, thus, a reflection of real social conditions in which the territorial state and the king played a dominant role.

The rise of monotheism did not, however, lead to a complete elimination of polytheistic beliefs. On the contrary, both monotheism and polytheism existed side by side. One of the gods like Siva or Vishnu or the goddess Kali was turned into the principal deity, but, at the same time, other gods and goddesses were also worshipped, although with less fervour.

Monism must be distinguished from monotheism. The former is a philosophical concept whereas the latter is the religious belief in a single God. Monism explains the world and the diverse phenomena of nature by means of a single substance from which everything originates and to which everything returns. It is the beginning and end of the world structure, its starting point as well as its goal.

Monism apeared at a higher stage in the development of speculative thought in ancient philosophy. While the idealist philosophers maintained that man and the diverse phenomena of nature were the results of the arbitrary volition of some transcendental Supreme Power, the materialists sought the origin of all natural phenomena in nature itself and came to the conclusion

that there was nothing outside man and nature. Some traced the origin of the universe to air while some other philosophers thought water was the basic element out of which all things originated. The Vedantins declared that Brahman was the first cause, while the Samkhyavadins asserted that the world of name and form evolved out of unevolved matter. Thus, according to the ancient philosophers, both body and soul, matter and spirit, evolved out of a single substance: matter or spirit. In other words, they derived the totality of the real either from matter or from spirit alone.

Thus, the fundamental problem of philosophical monism was linked with the problem of the primary, ultimate substance of the world. What was primary? Matter or Spirit? Chit or Achit? Did consciousness evolve out of matter or *vice versa*? Dualism, which regarded body and soul as mutually independent, is incapable of answering this question. For that matter, it does not even pose the question; it recognises neither the primacy of matter nor the primacy of spirit. According to it, the world has two primary bases, different in nature and independent of each other—matter and spirit. The world and its diverse phenomena evolved out of them. The two entities—mind and matter—are regarded as separate, unconnected and mutually exclusive. It considers both material substance and spiritual substance, *i.e.*, both the world of nature and God as real, eternal and uncreated. It is, however, unable to explain how the two independent substances which have nothing in common are related to each other, or influence each other. Monism, on the other hand, explains the world from a single basis, either from matter or from spirit. Thus, two kinds of monism are possible: materialist monism and idealist monism. Both considered the universe as evolving entirely out of a single substance.

Among the philosophers of ancient India, there were idealist monists as well as materialist monists. Materialist monism considered that the unity of the universe consisted in its materialness. As against this, idealist monism assumed that spirit or consciousness was the basis of existence and that the material world was derived from a spiritual source. All the schools of the later Vedanta upheld the priority of idea over matter — not

ordinary human ideas, but Absolute Idea existing independently of man.

The ancient schools of Indian philosophy were interested in the basic principles of the world and in applying them to real life so as to discover the nature of reality. It is true that some of them, especially the idealists, could not apprehend the real relation between thought and its material basis. But, even they stood up against the rigid dogmatism and ritualism of the Brahmanas, and encouraged man's spirit of enquiry.

Refuting the materialist view that consciousness evolved out of matter, the idealists argued that all changes in the material world were initiated by a Supreme Spirit as the creator of the universe. They upheld Brahman as the first cause. But, even they recognised the objective reality of the world. It may be pointed out that Badarayana's Brahma Sutra has nowhere questioned the real existence of nature and man.

In the Middle Ages, however, discussion shifted to the problem whether the world was real or unreal, whether the jiva and Brahman were identical or different. The Yogacharas vehemently argued that only cognition was real and the Madhyamikas asserted with equal vehemence that nature and the universe, man and his consciousness, everything was void, sunya. The different schools of medieval Vedanta argued that the physical world was derived from and dependent on Brahman. Of course, they had different approaches to the question as to the relation that existed between Brahman and the world, whether this relation was one of difference or identity. This, indeed, formed the pivot of the the differences among the main Vedantic schools of the feudal era—Sankara's absolute monism, Ramanuja's modified monism, Madhva's dualism, Nimbarka's dualistic monism and Vallabha's pure non-dualism. The various schools of Saivism also visualised a Supreme Spirit as the substratum of the world.

Sankara's Advaita, which expressed idealist monism in its extreme form, declared that the world of matter did not exist at all and that the ominipotent, omniscient Absolute Idea was the only reality. Individual self and this Absolute Reality were identical. According to Sankara, consciousness was luminous

(svayamprakasa). It was unproduced, eternal and did not undergo any transformation. Thus, the objective idealism of early Vedanta was transformed into subjective idealism by Sankara.

Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and others, on the contrary, recognised the reality of both jiva and jagat, soul and body. They too, like Sankara, thought that the individual soul was an eternal, spiritual entity. But, unlike Sankara, they maintained that it was distinct from Brahman. The material world to them was real; but, Brahman, the first cause, had a superior reality.

The theory of monism did not prevent the idealists from believing in and worshipping personal gods or goddesses to whom all love and devotion were due. Even Sankara, the greatest protagonist of idealist monism in the form of an unqualified Nirguna Brahman, devoid of all personal attributes, composed a number of devotional hymns addressed to his goddess. Thus, monotheism coexisted with monism.

But, monism did not necessarily demand a belief in God or in any other supernatural power. Even atheists could be monists, because they too held that the world essentially evolved out of one single substance. Matter was conceived as the one substance, the one foundation of being and knowledge. What they rejected was idealist monism which viewed the world as the manifestation or evolute of Absolute Idea existing independently of man. Lenin observed: "Everybody knows what is human idea, but an idea independent of man and prior to man, an idea in the abstract, an Absolute Idea, is a theological invention."

This is not to say that the idealist concepts of our ancient thinkers were nothing but superstitious nonsense. "Philosophical idealism," Lenin wrote, "is nonsense only from the standpoint of a crude, simple and metaphysical materialism."[1] Crude, mechanical materialism does not understand that knowledge depends on the constructive activity of the mind and on the conditions of knowing. Idealism was, in fact, a "one-sided, exaggerated, swollen development" of this truth about knowledge.

The ancient materialist, who worked under unfavourable

[1]Lenin: *Materialism and Empirio-criticism.*

circumstances, could not avoid serious shortcomings in their doctrines and formulations. The complex phenomena bound up with the activities of the human mind were not properly understood or analysed by them. No scientific methods of investigation were available in those days and, therefore, their materialism was of a purely speculative character. Under such circumstances, they were not much effective in combating idealism. On the other hand, idealist philosophers found it easy to expose their inconsistencies and oppose their theories. In the Middle Ages, idealism dominated the minds of the people.

Times have, however, changed in favour of materialism. Thanks to the tremendous advance of modern science which has brought to light much of the hitherto unknown properties of matter, we are now in a position to understand the inherent contradictions and interconnections of the most intricate developments of nature and society and solve the enigmas of the human mind and the problem of the "spirit" more satisfactorily than ever before.

In spite of such discoveries of science, the problem of matter and mind, the central question which divides all philosophy into two camps, is again and again brought to the forefront by idealist writers. Some of them vainly seek a justification of their idealism in the development of science and assert that the new discoveries of science have proved that matter does not exist. P.T. Raju, for example, tries to reduce matter to a mere appearance, a mere norm or a value. "What is matter for us," he writes, "appears as matter only because of the ideal matter discovered by science. It is presupposed by our gross conception of matter. It does exist, and makes the apparent existence of the latter possible. Without it, the latter cannot even appear as matter. It is not necessary for us to say that it does not exist, or that it has no being. We may say that it is a value or a norm for science."[1]

C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer thinks that modern science has abolished matter and justified the theory of maya. He writes: "The higher sciences and philosophy of today have abolished substance as such

[1]P. T. Raju: *Idealist Thought of India*, p. 85-6.

and, in essence, reverted to the 'maya' theory of the Indian seers....Matter seems to lose its material characteristic."[1]

It is, of course, true that new discoveries of science and the latest physical theories have created a revolution both in science and in our understanding of the universe. But, unfortunately for the idealists, these discoveries are not at all in their favour. Till the beginning of the twentieth century, the scientists believed in the indivisibility of atoms, the constancy of mass, and the immutability of chemical elements. All these concepts were disproved by the new physical discoveries of the early twentieth century. The atom was understood to be a complex system composed of a positively charged nucleus and negatively charged electrons, and, therefore, divisible. Later on, more striking discoveries were made. The theory of relativity and the quantum theory again revised our notions of matter. It was found that there was a large variety of elementary particles at the nucleus of all physical bodies.

Do these discoveries concerning the nature of the atom prove that matter has disappeared or that it exists only as a hypothesis and not as an objective reality? Not at all. The physical conceptions of nature have changed, but still these conceptions reflect the objective reality of matter. They only show that man's knowledge of the physical universe has grown and become more profound.

The scientific concept of the universe is an endless transformation of matter from one state to another. It does not require a Supreme Intelligence to move it, because motion is inherent in matter. Man evolved from nature (prakriti), and consciousness (chetana), which reflects the world, is a special property of matter at a high stage of evolution. Thus, man is not mere matter. He is not merely a part of nature. He is capable of knowing nature and changing it. He sits in judgement on nature and rules over it; but as Engels observed, "we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like some one standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the

[1]C. P. Ramaswami Iyer: *The Meaning of Existence* in *Bhavan's Journal*, Aug. 25, 1957.

fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws."[4] Thus, there is no unbridgeable separation of man and nature. There is no contradiction between mind and matter, between soul and body. Monism seeks to understand reality in its undivided wholeness and basic oneness. Rejecting both idealist monism and dualism, Marxism upholds materialist monism, the material unity of the world, according to which all phenomena originate from matter — uncreated, indestructible, infinite and eternally changing.

At the same time, it will be unscientific to dismiss all the idealist concepts and religious notions of the Middle Ages as superstitious and reactionary; for, every ideology is brought forth by a particular historical situation. The scientific approach is to study every religious system or ideology in the context of the prevailing conditions, observing how each in its turn reacted on the situation which brought it forth. The medieval religious and philosophical systems were bound by the limitations of feudalism. But this does not mean that all medieval ideas served the interests of the feudal lords. On the contrary, they reflected the conflicting aspirations of the people and the earthly struggles of the different classes of society. In this sense, the fight against Sankara's Advaita Vedanta launched by Ramanuja and others was of great historical significance. In the conditions of later feudalism, when class contradictions intensified, the sense of the Absolute became an expression of the love of the universal man, which corresponded to the aspirations of the people to do away with all differences of caste and creed, with inequality and oppression. By offering the path of devotion to a personal deity endowed with compassion, justice and benevolence, as a means of attaining release from wordly ills, the Vaishnavism of Ramanuja and the Bhakti movement that followed it held out a ray of hope to their adherents.

Religion, in the words of Marx, became not only "the sigh of the hard-pressed creature and the heart of a heartless world," but also "a protest against the real misery" of the world, a protest against caate-distinctions and the inhumanity of feudal oppression.

[4]F. Engels: *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 292.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE ADVENT OF ISLAM AND LATER FEUDALISM

"ISLAM," wrote Engels, "is a religion adapted to Orientals, especially Arabs, *i.e.*, on the one hand, to townsmen engaged in trade and industry, on the other, to nomadic Bedouins."[1] Under its founder, Prophet Mohammed (approx. A.D. 570-632) and his immediate successors, known as the Caliphs, Islam helped to unite the trading classes and the backward tribal communities and became the ideological basis of feudalism in Arabia. One of the special features of the evolution of feudalism in the Arabian peninsula was that it retained not only elements of slave relations, but also strong remnants of tribal communism. That is why it attracted vast sections of the peoples of the territories in Asia and Africa conquered by the Caliphs. The conquerors appeared on the scene as the crusaders of the new religion, and, as Engels put it, the general historical movement acquired a religious imprint.[2]

Long before the birth of Islam, people from Arabia had friendly contacts with Indians, and some of them had settled down on the west coast of India. They had come not as invaders but as traders. Even in the first centuries after the rise of Islam, they continued to maintain cordial relations with the people. The Hindu rulers of India, in their turn, welcomed the Arabs and gave all possible encouragement to their trade. The Zamorin of Malabar, for example, allowed them to build mosques in his territory and to propagate their religion without any hindrance. He even encouraged some of his subjects to get themselves converted to Islam so as to have more sailors to man his ships, for, Hindus in those days were not allowed to cross the seas or become sailors. The immigrant Arabs were even allowed to marry native Hindu women, and so the number of Muslims increased rapidly.

But, by the beginning of the eighth century A.D., another phase

[1] *Marx and Engels on Religion*, p. 314.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

of Islamic influence also had begun. This started from the north-west. Arabs under Mohammed bin Kassim invaded India from Baluchistan, and conquered Sind and the Lower Punjab. About three centuries later, between A.D. 1000 and 1030, Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India as many as seventeen times, looting and plundering the country, and carried away immense wealth. It is true that he did not succeed in establishing an empire in India. Yet, his invasions devastated the land, weakened its military resources and made the way easier for further invasions. The prevalence of the caste system in Hindu society, with its obnoxious features such as untouchability, its blind faith in the doctrine of karma, etc. had also made the people indifferent to all happenings outside their immediate sphere and emasculated their spirit of resistance. The Indian rulers were disunited and were continuously at war with one another. All this prepared the ground for the eventual establishment of feudal states under the Muslim conquerors.

Towards the closing years of the twelfth century, the Turks under Muhammad Ghori launched from the north-west a successful expedition and took possession of Delhi and other adjacent areas in Northern India. In 1206, at the death of Muhammad Ghori, his viceroy and commander Kutub-ud-din Aibak seized power and declared himself the first Sultan of Delhi and founded the Slave dynasty. The succeeding centuries witnessed the firm consolidation of the Delhi Sultanate. Different dynasties like the Slave dynasty, the Khiljis, the Tughlaks, the Sayyids and the Lodis occupied the throne one after another till 1526 when Babar defeated the last ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, Ibrahim Lodi, and founded the Moghul empire. Many Hindu kingdoms of North India, and even some of those in the South, had already succumbed to the Muslim power in Delhi and accepted the paramountcy of the Sultanate.

One of the historically significant features of the Delhi Sultanate was that it built up, for the first time in India, a powerful medieval state with a huge standing army which was required to suppress the discontented chieftains and feudal lords. The Delhi Sultans were noted for their opulence; they maintained large

harems and hordes of slaves. The character of the Sultanate was feudal. Endowed with divine sanction by the ulema, the ruler had unquestioned authority over his subjects. The highest officers were Viziers who were in charge of the army and collection of revenues. The whole territory under the Sultanate was divided into different provinces under Muslim governors.

Muslim invaders brought with them a new religious outlook, but no new mode of production. They could not change the basis of feudalism in India. They initiated, however, some new forms of feudal ownership and created a central state machinery to run a new feudal empire.

It may be pointed out here that the Muslim rulers and potentates in India had by this time given up many features of early Islam. Outwardly, of course, they professed to be fervent followers of Islam and made a show of respect for Islamic rites and prayers, but their religion had very little in common with that of Prophet Mohammed or his immediate successors. Indeed, the early teachings of the Quran had become overlaid with new ideas even under the supremacy of the theocratic Caliphate; and the followers of Mohammed found it necessary, in the new conditions of expanding Islam, to formulate new theological tenets, collect old traditions and establish a new canonical authority so as to satisfy the needs of a strong feudal state. Thus, long before the Delhi Sultanate, the Muslim conquerors had imbibed many non-Islamic ideas of the Persian upper classes with whom they had come in contact. "The Sultanate violated many well-known laws of Islam," wrote K. M. Ashraf, "for instance, the principle of electing a monarch, the law of inheritance defining the shares of inherited property and the principles of apportioning them, the strict distinction between what is permitted (halal) and what is forbidden (haram). In fact, as a shrewd statesman of the age observed, the Sultanate had formulated its own laws which were on a different footing from those of Islam. The laws of the Sultanate could be summarized in one phrase—the will of the Sultan. Any, even the loosest, interpretation of the political ideals of the Quran could not be reconciled with this glaring and barefaced absolutism."[2]

[2]K. M. Ashraf: *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, p.15.

Not only in the affairs of the state, but also in the religious sphere and philosophical outlook, Islam in India differed from its original form and content. True, it retained some elements of its original simplicity, tribal democracy and social justice. These were certainly a great attraction in a caste-ridden country where large sections of the population were treated as untouchables and unapproachables. And many Hindus willingly joined the Islamic fold.

In the early stages of their ascendancy in India, Muslims might have looked upon the obnoxious caste system, idolatry and other Hindu beliefs and practices with horror or contempt. But, it was impossible to do away with such a deeprooted way of life. The social conditions that prevailed in India also were not suitable for the retention and development of the elements of tribal democracy, brotherhood and equality brought by the new religion. Further, as has been pointed out by Titus, "the forces that could be brought from a foreign country at any time were not sufficient to police such a large country and such an enormous population, and bring them to accept Islam through fear of superior power."[4]

The invaders, thus, found it necessary to yield to circumstances and allow Hinduism and Islam with their different religious beliefs and socio-political functions to coexist in India. After all, the invaders had come, not for social and religious reforms, nor for the propagation of simplicity and democracy, but for the establishment of state power which would maintain and nourish their feudal interests and privileges. But, coexistence was only the beginning. It led to conflict on one side and mutual understanding, toleration, absorption, and fraternisation on the other. Islam powerfully influenced Hindu life and outlook. "It is hardly possible," wrote Tarachand, "to exaggerate the extent of Muslim influence over Indian life in all departments. But nowhere else is it shown so vividly and so picturesquely as in customs, in intimate details of domestic life, in music, in the fashion of dress, in the ways of cooking, in the ceremonial of marriage, in the celebration of festivals and fairs, and in the courtly institutions and the etiquette

[4]Murray T. Titus: *Islam in India and Pakistan*, p. 157, Calcutta, 1959.

of Mahratta, Rajput and Sikh princes. In the days of Babar, the Hindus and Muslims lived and thought so much alike that he was forced to notice their peculiar Hindustani way; his successors so gloriously adorned and so marvellously enriched this legacy that India might well be proud today of the heritage which they in their turn have left behind." At the same time, Islam adapted itself to the Indian environment and absorbed many local customs and beliefs, ceremonies and superstitions, and even philosophical ideas. The result was that Islam acquired certain new characteristics which differentiated it from the classical Islam of Arabia. It became one of the religio-philosophical systems of India, and caste differences, far from disappearing, began to corrode Islam too. Indian Muslims came to be divided into "sharif zats" or high castes and "ajlaf zats" or low castes. Hindu converts who came from high castes were fortunate enough to become "sharifs," but those who came from low castes remained "ajlafs." Those who embraced Islam changed their faith, but it was not easy to change their customs and traditions, and what was more important, their economic position in society. People belonging to the low castes continued to be kept aloof even after they adopted Islam. As Dr. Ashraf remarked, "with his conversion to Islam the average Muslim did not change his old environment, which was deeply influenced by caste distinctions and a general social exclusiveness. As a result, Indian Islam slowly began to assimilate the broad features of Hinduism. The various classes of which the Mulsim community was composed began to live aloof from one another even in separate quarters in the same city."[8]

There were different social groups within the ruling class itself. The division generally indicated the countries of their origin—Sayyids and Shaiks of Arabian origin, Moguls of Turkish origin, and Pathans who hailed from Afghanistan. These groups had their subdivisions also.

Not only feudal lords and nobles but also leaders of the Muslim clergy—the mullas and the ulema—often belonged to the higher castes like the Sayyids and Shaiks. The Muslims had no

[8]Tarachand: *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, pp. 141-42.

[8]K.M. Ashraf : *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustam* p. 78.

central church and there was no division into castes based on theological functions. In other words, the clergy was not a special caste. The mufti (lawyer), kazi (judge), and mukthasil (educationist), who were part and parcel of the clergy, also belonged to the ulema. And then there were agricultural castes (thakurs, ahirs and so on) and farm labourers and artisans. Needless to say, the farm labourers, poor peasants and artisans were generally "ajlafs." "There is a wide range of caste-names," wrote Titus, "found in the second division of Muslims, such as Julaha, Teli, Bhat, Gogis and the like. Most of them indicate occupation as the Teli, who makes oil (tel). Most of them are just the old Hindu caste or guild name carried over. Not only do caste names prevail, but many of the original caste prejudices as well in respect of eating, drinking and marriage. There is even a caste called the Kalal in north India, which engages in liquor dealings quite contrary to the precepts of the faith, but in spite of this some of the men of this class have become prominent in public affairs."[7]

It is true that caste rules were not as strict as those of the Hindus, at least in the early stages. Changes in economic position helped them to change their castes without much difficulty. There was an old saying to the point: "Last year I was a Julaha (weaver); this year a Shaik; and next year, if the harvest be good, I shall be a Sayyid."

But, in practice, it was not so easy for an oppressed worker to acquire the position and status of a noble. The working people—weavers, water carriers, oil mongers, wood cutters, farm labourers and other occupational groups among the Muslims—were looked down upon as lower castes, and their position was hardly different from that of their Hindu compeers. The spiritual leaders of Islam, who allied themselves with the feudal classes, generally supported this state of affairs. Just like the Hindu priests, the Muslim priests also sought to perpetuate class divisions and caste distinctions in society. Ziauddin Barni, Muhammad Baqir Khan and other celebrities of the Moghul period tried to prove that the existing social order was ordained by Allah and had to be pre-

[7]Murray T. Titus: *Islam in India and Pakistan*, p. 177.

served. Baqir Khan, for example, wrote, in 1612, in his famous "Admonitions on Government":

> "Rulers should not permit unworthy people with evil natures to be put on an equality with people with a pure lineage and wisdom and they should consider the maintenance of rank among the fundamental customs and usages of rulership. For, if the differences between classes disappear and the lower class boast of living on an equality with the 'median' class, and the 'median' boast of living on an equality with the upper, rulers will lose prestige, and complete undermining of the bases of kingdom will appear."[8]

It is interesting to note, however, that although caste was recognised in social relations, yet, when it came to prayer and worship, caste and class differences were ignored. The ideal of Muslim brotherhood was preserved within the four walls of the mosque. The poor and the rich worshipped side by side, but outside they were again ajlafs and sharifs!

Hindus and Muslims, belonging to two distinct religions, certainly had their points of difference; for, as Tarachand himself has pointed out, "while consciousness of group developed, and the element of territoriality was prominent in both, the content of the two did not quite coincide and fuse."[9] In this sense, the poor low caste Hindu was different from his counterpart, the Muslim "ajlaf." But, they were not, as some modern publicists stress, different nations. There were no racial or ethnical differences. The farm labourers or artisans belonging to the two religious groups actually belonged to one class even as the Hindu lords and their Muslim counterparts belonged to the same class.

Nevertheless, with a view to consolidating their influence among the people, the new Muslim rulers encouraged the conversion of Hindus to Islam. They allowed special privileges to Muslims. All important posts in the army and the administration were held by Muslims, especially in the initial stages. The Muslim nobility

[8]Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.): *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 517-18.

[9]Tarachand, quoted by H. Kabir: *Abul Kalam Azad*, Bombay 1959, p. 238.

had a predominant role in the state as war lords, administrators and advisers. Thus, a small minority of the upper stratum of the Muslim community rose to positions of power and affluence.

Not that the Hindu nobility were exterminated. Side by side with Muslim nobles, Hindu zamindars also flourished. In subjugating the masses and exploiting the peasantry, Muslim rulers often conciliated the richer sections of the Hindus. Many administrative posts of lesser importance were given to them. But, the hard core of Muslim aristocracy always remained superior to the Hindu feudal lords. They received from the Sultanate large revenue assignments called aqta. Possessors of aqta lands had a higher status than the Hindu zamindars, because they were obliged to maintain a regular army to help the paramount power in times of need. The strength of the army depended on the military rank of the aqtadar who used a portion of his income from the land for hiring soldiers. Originally, lands were granted by the state for a fixed number of years, and sometimes for the lifetime of the grantee. But, in course of time, possession became hereditary and, by the middle of the fourteenth century, the possessors of aqta became a powerful force in society. The Sultanate also granted lands to religious personages who were loyal to the state. They too became powerful feudal lords. The Sultanate also created waqf lands (religious endowments), the income from which was used for the maintenance of mosques and madrassas (schools) and for irrigation, etc. Thus, under the Sultanate, considerable portions of land and other wealth passed into the hands of Muslim feudal lords, religious leaders and military commanders.

The Sultan was not merely the supreme military commander. He was a fuedal lord himself, for, he owned huge private estates called khas or khalisa lands (crown lands).

Side by side with the lands possessed by the state and private feudal interests, communal landholding also continued to exist. Most of the Hindu headmen and accountants of local village administration were retained by the new rulers. The changes in state structure and incessant wars of conquest did not radically alter the life of the people living under this age-old system. The conquerors, however, used the village community as an instrument for the

exploitation of the peasantry. Payment of tax was the collective responsibility of the village. But, as has been pointed out earlier, feudalism had fostered and sanctified social and economic inequalities within the village community, and emphasised the distinctions between the high and the low. The village setup began to be dominated more and more by the prosperous upper stratum of society while the peasant masses became more and more impoverished.

The principal sources of revenue under the Sultanate were land revenue, the income from khas lands, a share of the produce from aqta lands, the spoils of war, house tax, water tax, etc. The Sultans also levied a special tax on "non-believers" (jazia). This was originally a tax levied on non-Muslims, "in return for which they received protection of life and property and exemption from military service," but, in course of time, it became a religious tax levied on all Hindus. The peasants, no doubt, had to bear the brunt of these various taxes and this naturally fanned the fires of revolt among them. The situation was aggravated during the reign of the Lodi dynasty in the middle of the fifteenth century, when a number of villages revolted against the Afghans assigned to collect the revenues. But, such revolts were cruelly suppressed.

The feuds and conflicts among the feudal lords, rebellions of vassal chieftains, and the increasing discontent of the peasants combined to weaken ultimately the authority of the Sultanate. Bengal asserted its independence of Delhi, and about the middle of the fourteenth century, Shams-ud-din Iliyas Shah assumed control of the entire province. Following this example, other vassals also threw off their allegiance to the Sultanate and became independent. The beginning of the sixteenth century saw the rise in Northern India of many small feudal kingdoms like Bengal, Jaunpur, Malwa, Bihar, Kashmir, Sind, Multan and Gujarat. The Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan, which flourished on the ruins of the Delhi Sultanate, was rather extensive and powerful but the ambitious and unscrupulous policies of the Bahmani Sultans, coupled with court intrigues and popular discontent, led to its breakup at the end of the fifteenth century. Out of the scattered remains of the Bahmani empire, independent kingdoms like Berar, Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golconda and Bidar arose in the Deccan.

The dissensions and rivalries among these various Sultans paved the way for the consolidation and expansion of the famous Vijayanagar empire which became the most powerful state in India in the fifteenth century. The Italian traveller Nicolo Conti, who visited Vijayanagar in 1420, wrote: "In this city there are estimated to be ninety thousand men fit to bear arms. Their king is more powerful than all the other kings of India."[18] But, within a century, this empire also showed signs of decay when its army failed to hold the combined offensive of Bijapur, Ahmednagar, Bidar and Golconda. After its defeat in the battle of Talikota (A.D. 1565), the Vijayanagar empire soon disintegrated, giving way to a number of independent kingdoms in the South.

Meanwhile, Babar, a descendant of Timur and the ruler of Kabul, had invaded North India with an army raised in Central Asia. He had to face the gallant resistance put up by Ibrahim Lodi, the last Sultan of Delhi, and Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar. But, in the historic battle of Panipat in 1526, he defeated Ibrahim Lodi, occupied Delhi and founded the Moghul dynasty. He soon extended his sway over the greater part of North India, subjugating by force or diplomacy most of the small kingdoms. Thus was established the greatest and most powerful feudal empire in Indian history which lasted about two centuries and a half, leaving its indelible imprint on India's culture and civilisation.

The Moghul empire attained the zenith of its glory during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605), the grandson of Babar. Akbar unified a major part of the country under a centralised administration and put an end to the prevalent pattern of small, scattered kingdoms warring with one another. He divided his empire into a number of provinces and appointed viceroys to administer them under his direct supervision. Akbar's relations with the Hindus were very cordial. As a token of goodwill, he abolished the levy called jazia imposed on the Hindus by his predecessors. He appointed Hindu feudal lords to high positions in the administration and in the army. Hindu pundits adorned his court along with Muslim divines and scholars. He further strengthened his relations with the Hindus

[18]Quoted by Robert Sewell: *A Forgotten Empire*, pp. 80, 82.

by matrimonial alliances with Rajput rulers. Akbar himself had a Rajput wife.

The Moghul emperor was convinced that a strong, centralised state could not be built on the foundations of the fanatical, Hindu-baiting ideology of the ulema who had become "not only narrow-minded and bigoted, but also avaricious, corrupt and given to mutual jealousies and court intrigues." In order to forestall their power, Akbar tried to consolidate his state power on a strictly secular and popular basis with the support of all Hindus and Muslims who held liberal and heterodox views on religion. He was influenced and encouraged in this work by Abul Fazl and his brother, Faizi, who extolled him as the "Shadow of God." In Ain-i-Akbari, Abul Fazl wrote:

> "The king should be above all religious differences and should see that religious considerations do not come in the way of the duty which he owes to every class and every community. Under his all-embracing care, everyone should find peace and happiness so that the benefits conferred by the Shadow of God are universal."

Akbar himself is stated to have written as follows in one of his letters addressed to Shah Abbas the ruler of Persia:

> "The various religious communities are divine treasures entrusted to us by God. We must love them as such. It should be our firm faith that every religion is blessed by Him, and our earnest endeavour to enjoy the bliss of the ever-green garden of universal toleration. The Eternal King showers His favours on all men without distinction. Kings who are 'Shadows of God' should never give up this principle."

With a view to checking the obscurantism of the ulema, Akbar encouraged comparative studies of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions. Toleration, brotherhood and freedom of conscience were his declared policies. He invited Sufis, pundits, and thinkers of different religions to his "House of Prayer" at Fatehpur Sikri and initiated philosophical discussions. When the ulema frowned at these activities, he proclaimed himself the "Imam Adil," *i.e.*, the religious head of the Muslims. He even

made an effort to establish a new religion, Din-i-Ilahi. But owing to the determined opposition of the orthodox Muslims, he did not succeed in this attempt.

On the death of Akbar in 1605, his son, Salim, succeeded to the throne assuming the title of Jehangir, conqueror of the world. He was a weak monarch addicted to wine and other pleasures. He died in 1627 when his son Shah Jehan, the great builder, became emperor (1627-1658). Both Jehangir and Shah Jehan made repeated attempts to expand the empire farther south.

But, already the first symptoms of disintegration of the Moghul administration had appeared. Merciless exploitation had pauperised the peasant masses, and famine and epidemics stalked the Deccan and the Gujarat. The popular disenchantment with the Moghul empire grew into bitterness and open rebellions during the long reign of Shah Jehan's son, Aurangzeb, whose religious bigotry and intolerance took the country backward from the enlightened secular ideals of Akbar. The Maharashtrians under Shivaji began their struggle for liberation from Moghul domination and, in middle of the seventeenth century, they carved out a powerful, independent state of their own. There was unrest in Rajasthan also. All this quickened the decline of the great Moghul empire.

Historically speaking, it was the Moghuls who first gave to India a unified and centralised administration. Vast areas of the country were brought together under a single, centralised feudal state, particularly during the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb. Yet, within this vast empire, a high degree of autonomy was maintained by many Hindu and Muslim vassal kings. And these feudal lords, time and again, raised the banner of revolt against the central authority, too.

The men who succeeded Aurangzeb — Mohammed Shah, Ahmad Shah, Alamgir II, Shah Alam II, Akbar II and Bahadur Shah — remained emperors only in name. The boundaries of the empire began to shrink fast. The lesser fry among the Rajas and Sultans and the erstwhile Governors also were engaged in a fierce struggle for power which marked an era of internecine warfare. These developments, combined with mounting feudal exploitation and oppression, brought the country to the verge of economic

exhaustion. Land revenue collected by the State was exorbitant and comprised anything between 50 and 75 per cent of the produce, leaving to the peasants less than what was required for the lowest level of subsistence. As early as A.D. 1468, towards the end of the Sultanate, the Russian traveller, Afanisi Nikitin, had observed: "The country is overstocked with people; but those in the country are very miserable, while the nobles are extremely opulent and delight in luxury." Things were not much different in the South either. Sewell remarks that " the ryots of South India were grievously oppressed by the nobles" and that the masses of the people were "living in the greatest poverty and distress."[11] Moreland mentions a number of famines that broke out in Moghul India in the seventeenth century.[12] Economic chaos prevailed in the land creating an atmosphere advantageous to the foreign aggressors prowling around. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Moghul empire had virtually become extinct, although nominally it dragged on for another century.

The Moghul period broadly marked the end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern era in Indian history. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, a new spirit was abroad in India; fresh winds blew in every field—economic, administrative, social and cultural. Feudal relations showed signs, for the first time, of giving way gradually to growing bourgeois relationships. This was also the period of the nascent beginnings of the nationalities in India, with the growth of diverse languages. There was a manysided intellectual ferment in the land, an allround upsurge which shook it up after centuries of slumber and stagnation.

The self-sufficient village community was still the basic unit of social production and administration. This does not, however, mean that the entire land was commonly owned by the village community or that no private landownership existed in India. The village community was only one of the forms of agrarian relations and was not an all-embracing, universal system. Within the community itself, different types of ownership existed. In some communities, it was a combination of private and common ownership. Com-

[11]Sewell: *A Forgotten Empire*, p. 280-81.

[12]Moreland: *Akbar to Aurangazeb*, pp. 204-19.

mon ownership extended only to waste lands, pasture lands and forests while all cultivable lands belonged to rich families. In some communities, land was nominally owned in common, but, in practice, it was periodically distributed for cultivation among high caste peasant families who possessed their plots by hereditary right. And this hereditary possession gradually changed into private ownership leading to inequalities and rivalries within the village community, which were further aggravated by the grant of land to individuals for military and other services.

It was in this complicated system that between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries elements of the capitalist mode of production began to appear. The combination of agriculture and industry, the traditional form of production under feudalism, began to be undermined and artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, smiths, smelters, tanners, sugar workers, indigo workers and the like, began to be employed as labourers under capitalist masters.

Compared to Europe, however, India lagged behind in commodity production and exchange on capitalist lines. They developed in the country at a slower pace. Perhaps, this can be explained by the historical peculiarities of Indian society. The intensification of feudal exploitation, the weakness of political centralisation, persistence of the village community, the absence of a common national language, the rigid caste system and other obsolete customs operated as obstructive factors.

Commodities for exchange were mainly produced by the artisans working at home, singly or with the help of a few apprentices. Apart from modern machinery which was unknown, even the manufacturing system — the precursor of capitalist industry — was comparatively undeveloped. In the cities and townships which had grown around the royal palaces, a few workshops making cotton and silk dresses, ornaments, household utensils, arms and other implements had sprung up. But even the production in these *karkhanas* was primarily meant to meet the needs of the palaces, the officials and the army. Only a few artisans were actually engaged in making textiles for sale in foreign markets. The exquisite artistry of these products won worldwide esteem for India's crafts-

manship. But, the internal market remained stagnant and undeveloped. Agriculture and industry were so closely linked that the demarcation between them was not as defined as in Europe. This system had its own weaknesses. As Professor Gadgil pointed out, the artisan who did all the miscellaneous duties connected with his occupation in the village did not specialise and the division of labour was extremely limited.[13]

The growth of the urban centres of production enriched the feudal lords further. With more wealth in their hands, they spent more lavishly on luxury articles, and on the construction of temples and mosques, palaces and pavilions. But, even after such extravagance, they had surplus goods in their hands, and it was in disposing of them that the exchange and sale of commodities developed at first. In course of time, trade between the towns expanded, and, as a result, certain sections of the population began working exclusively on the manufacture of goods for the market. Each category of people following a particular profession constituted a caste with its own panchayat. The traders too had their own organisation.

Vasco da Gama first landed on the Malabar coast in 1498 and groups of Portuguese, Dutch, French and British traders came to India frequently. During the days of Jehangir, European trading companies were given permission to establish their own warehouses and factories on Indian soil.

It was a period of great changes. New economic forces were appearing on the scene. Facilities for intercourse between one region and another were on the increase. The growth of commodity production and exchange, increase in trade and commerce between India and foreign countries and the emergence of nascent capitalist elements adversely affected the dominant position of the feudal classes and strengthened the position of the merchants and the artisans in the social life of the country.

When Islam arrived in India, the tempo of economic and social development in the country was extremely slow. The religio-philosophical ideology of Hinduism was a reflection of this slow tempo and the seeming stability of the feudal order. But, now, the

[13]Dr. Gadgil: *The Industrial Evolution of India*, p. 10.

position changed. The roots of feudalism were shaken and class antagonisms sharpened. The new forces of production called for new social relations and the rise of ideas and ideologies suited to the new conditions became inevitable. And they did appear, as shown in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MYSTICISM AND HERETICISM IN ISLAM

WRITING about Europe in the Middle Ages, Engels pointed out that revolutionary opposition to feudalism, which was alive throughout that preriod, "took the shape of mysticism, open heresy, or armed insurrection, all depending on the conditions of the time. As for mysticism, it is well known how much sixteenth century reformers depended on it."[1]

This could be seen to be equally true of Indian mysticism of the Middle Ages. The social and religious reformers of the later Middle Ages in India depended not a little on mysticism in general and Sufi-mysticism in particular. "The influence exercised by Muslim mystics and religious thought," wrote Tarachand, "inspired a number of reform movement samong Hindus, which spread over the whole of the country and profoundly affected Hindu outlook upon life and Hindu modes of thought."[2]

Sufism was one of the most important trends of mysticism in the feudal era. It arose in the territories conquered by the Muslims in the eighth or ninth century A.D., and spread to India soon after the advent of Islam. Even before it came to India, it was acquainted with Buddhism and Hindu thought and had imbibed certain elements of Indian idealism. In India, Muslim idealism adopted many yogic practices and developed under the influence of Upanishadic idealism and Vedanta. The doctrine of the passing away of the individual self in union with God (*fana*) played an important role in the teachings of the Sufis. "The definition of *fana* as a moral state," Nicholson observed, "and the means by which the extinction of all passions and desires is brought about, agrees so exactly with the definition of *nirvana* that Buddhistic influence cannot be denied. As regards the pantheistic aspect of *fana*, the Vedanta and similar forms of Indian thought readily suggest

[1]Engels: *Peasant War in Germany.*

[2]Dr. Tarachand: *History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western*, Vol. I, p. 503.

themselves."[3] This made it more intelligible and appealing to the Indian people.

Sufism was a spiritual reflection of the growing social conflicts. The Sufis disliked the vices and luxurious living of the upper classes, which violated the Quranic precepts of simplicity and the brotherhood of man. They saw that Islam was becoming more and more subordinate to the state, and that the ulema, the kazis and the mullas representing religious orthodoxy were exploiting the Quranic doctrines to uphold and justify a social system based on oppression. But, at the same time, they found themsevles in a helpless position, unable to mobilise the people and fight for justice and the purity of Islam. It was under such conditions that they preferred to retire from the world and "devote themselves to the care of the spirit."

The early Sufis were ascetics. They lived a life of voluntary poverty and shunned worldly pleasures. Asceticism as an expression of the contradiction between the individual self and social reality was — at that particular stage of development of Indian society — a form of protest against the feudal order. Hostility to feudalism was expressed in the opposition to the way of life of the feudal nobility, their extravagance and love of pomp and pursuit of pleasure. The desire to shun worldly pleasure was a spiritual expression of this opposition. Asceticism, thus, roused the anti-feudal consciousness of the rural and urban poor. And, with increasing feudal oppression and discontent among the peasantry, the influence of Sufism also grew in strength.

The Sufis declared that the interpretations of Shariat law by Muslim theologians were against the spirit of Islam. While the high priests of orthodox Islam laid stress on the formalistic study of the Quran and the Hadis, on pilgrimages, fasts and prayers and religious rules of conduct, the Sufis emphasised the need for inner discipline and purity of heart and declared that the injunctions and prohibitions of the priests were of no use for communion with God. According to the Sufis, only selfless and spiritually perfect persons could reflect the "Divine Essence" and this was possible

[3]Reynold A. Nicholson: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 12, p. 12.

only through love which would inevitably lead to the union with the Divine Being. The essence of Sufism was intense God-consciousness to be experienced in a state of ecstasy. In their endeavour to find a philosophical explanation of their irrational mysticism, Sufis often depended on the teachings of the Upanishads and the Vedanta. Some of them even admitted openly that the Sufi ideas were similar to those of the Vedanta. Prince Dara Shikuh, the great-grandson of Akbar, for instance, wrote in his preface to Majmaul-bahrain that the differences between the monism of the sufis and that of the vedantists were merely verbal.[4] In Sirr-i-Akbar, the Persian rendering of 52 Upanishads, he even declared that the Quran was hidden in the Upanishads.[5] He identified the essence of the Upanishads with the essence of Islam. "Nowhere exists anything but God," he declared, "O you, in quest of God, you seek him everywhere, you verily are the God, not apart from Him".[6]

Some Sufis went to the extent of seeing truth in every religion and argued that, in spite of differences in form, all religions sought the same ends. Some others had an aversion to the company of the rich and association with kings. Khwaja Fariduddin, popularly known as Baba, said: "The main purpose in this path (Sufism) is the concentration of heart which can be achieved only by the abstention from prohibited means of livelihood and association with kings."[7] He tried to inculcate the spirit of charity in his disciples and advised them to shun worldly wealth and adopt voluntary poverty. As Noor Nabi points out, "the motive of Baba Farid was that one should not live for one's self but for others. So he instructed his Khalifahs to give away their entire property in the service of humanity at large."[8]

Ibn'l Arabi (1165-1240) was one of the foremost thinkers who tried to consolidate mysticism on a rational basis. He identified

[4]Istiaq Husain Quereshi: *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent*, p. 132.

[5]Bikramajit Hasarat: *Dara Shikuh: Life and Works*, Santi Niketan, 1963.

[6]*Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 445.

[7]Quoted by Yusef Hussein in *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 39.

[8]Mohammed Noor Nabi: *Development of Muslim Religious Thought in India*, p. 50.

the creator and the created and affirmed that the mystic could identify himself with God. He held that reality was one, that all apparent multiplicity was a mode of unity, and that the phenomenal was the outward manifestation of the real. Thus, the relation between the world and God was one of identity. This doctrine is known as Wahadatu'l Wujud (unity of being). Ibn'l Arabi re-intrepreted many Islamic precepts to suit the changing conditions. For instance, he changed the Islamic doctrine that "there exists but one God" to the statement : "There is nothing but God, nothing in existence other than He." God was the unity behind the diversity, the reality behind all phenomenal appearance. It is true that, on the basis of this doctrine, he propounded the theory of a life of ascetic inaction, but it had its own progressive significance; for, if everything was God, it was the duty of men to love each other and to oppose inequality and all differences of caste and creed that existed in human society. Thus, this doctrine was objectively directed against the reactionaries and conservatives who wanted to maintain their social order intact. This explains why the orthodox ulema who opposed Akbar's policy of secularism had first raised their voice against Ibn'l Arabi's doctrine of Wahadatu'l Wujud.

Like Vedanta, Sufism also gave rise to various sects, and the Sufis, organised in different silsilahs (monastic orders), went from place to place, preaching their doctrines. Some of the silsilahs converted many Hindus to Islam. But, their main activity was not religious conversion, but the propagation of spiritual discipline. Between the twelfth century and the sixteenth, a number of Sufi orders were established. Of these, the Chishti, the Suhrawardi, the Qadiri, the Shattari and the Naqshbandi orders enjoyed the greatest influence and popular favour. Shaik Nizamuddin Auliya was one of the greatest saints of the Chishti order founded by Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. He devoted his life to making the people live the good life. Renunciation, according to Auliya, "is not stripping oneself naked or sitting, wearing only a languta. Abandoning the world means wearing clothes and eating but not retaining what comes one's way, not acquiring or savouring anything, and not being attached to things."[9] Among his disciples

[9] *Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 435.

were "nobles and commoners, rich and poor, maliks and beggars, learned and illiterate, citizens and villagers, soldiers and civilians, freemen and slaves."[10]

Among these Sufi orders were large and wealthy religious associations as well as small brotherhoods of local importance. Some were influenced by feudal elements and other upper classes, while others were associated with merchants and artisans and were comparatively more progressive. Some considered Islam to be the only true religion and hugged the Sharia to their bosom, while others ignored the differences between one religion and another. Under such conditions, Sufism could not become a homogeneous, coherent and revolutionary philosophy of the masses. Some of the leaders of Sufism undoubtedly reflected the aspirations and discontent of the people, but the others tended to compromise with feudal lords who saw to it that this philosophy did not go against their vested interests and served to paralyse the capacity of the masses for action. "The conquerors excited the fury of the Indian people," Noor Nabi observes, "but the saints, with their unsullied character, purest morals and intense love for humanity, cooled down their temper, and imparted a new life to them."[11]

Thus, Sufism, which arose as a religious form of protest against the excesses of feudalism, became, in practice, especially towards the end of the Moghul rule, an instrument of reconciliation and compromise with the existing social order.

However, the ideas of equality and the brotherhood of man inherent in original Islam did not entirely disappear. Now and then emerged on the scene, individuals and groups who demanded a return to the old way of life of the townsmen engaged in trade and industry and of the poor nomadic tribes. And therein lay, in the words of Engels, "the embryo of a periodically recurring collision." Engels explained this phenomenon as follows: "The townspeople grow rich, luxurious and lax in observation of the 'law.' The Bedouins, poor and hence of strict morals, contemplate with envy and covetousness these riches and pleasures. Then

[10]Quoted by M. Habib in *Indian Inheritance*, Vol. I, p. 272.

[11]Mohammed Noor Nabi: *Development of Indian Religious Thought in India*, p. 59.

they unite under a prophet, a Mahdi, to chastise the apostates and restore the observation of the ritual and the true faith, and to appropriate, in recompense, the treasures of the renegades. In a hundred years, they are naturally in the same position as the renegades were; a new purge of the faith is required, a new Mahdi arises, and the game starts again from the beginning. That is what happened from the conquest campaigns of the African Almoravids and Almohads in Spain to the last Mahdi of Khartoum who so successfully thwarted the English. It happened in the same way or similarly with the rising in Persia and other Mohammedan countries. All these movements are clothed in religion, but they have their sources in economic causes."[12]

The title of Mahdi was originally associated with Ali's descendant Muhammad Mahdi who was an aspirant to the Caliphate. He died in A.D. 880, but his followers believed that he would come again to restore justice and righteousness. Since then, Mahdis appeared from time to time in various countries with the demand that the sovereign should be a descendant of the Prophet or Ali.

The Mahdi movement assumed definite shape in India in the later part of the fifteenth century. One Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur declared one fine morning that a voice from heaven had announced to him, "Thou art the Mahdi." And he became a preacher and reformer. His followers increased in number as he was driven from place to place by the sultans and nobles of the time. He died in Baluchistan in A.D. 1505.

Another Mahdi appeared in the sixteenth century during the reign of Islam Shah (A.D. 1545-1552). He was Shaik Alai, a resident of Biana near Agra. Historian Badauni writes about him: "Trampling under foot his self-esteem and conceit, he devoted himself to the poor of his neighbourhood, and entering the valley of self-renunciation and abnegation, he bestowed all his worldly possessions, even his book, upon the poor."[13]

He formed "a community of ascetic socialists or communists consisting of three hundred house-holders," mainly traders and artisans. This peculiar asceticism did not bar them from keeping

[12]Marx and Engels: *On Religion*, p. 317.

[13]*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 8, p. 339.

weapons of war. Nor did they hesitate to defy any law which they did not like. Shaik Alai became so popular and such a threat to the existing order that he was tortured to death by King Islam Shah. But, this did not kill the movement. Shaik Alai's adherents increased and their influence was felt even during the reign of Akbar.

The Mahdi movement which had spread among traders, wood cutters, water carriers and other poorer sections of the people, was based on faith in a just ruler coming forward to establish a social order without class and caste distinctions. As reformers of Islam, they assumed a hostile attitude to the emperor, his officers and feudal lords. Their main criticism was that the Moghul rulers had departed from the noble principles of Islam. The Mahdi movement was, thus, an expression of protest against exploitation and oppression, and naturally it appealed to the poorer sections of the Muslims.

Islam in India produced some other heretical sects also. The Shiya sect of the Islamis, for instance, first came to India as a semi-religious heretical movement known as the movement of the Carmathians. They had established a colony in Multan in the ninth or tenth century. Mahmud of Ghazni and, after him, Muḥammad Ghori tried to suppress them, but they managed to become a considerable force in North-West India during the reign of the Sultanate. The teachings of the Carmathians roused the oppressed people in general, and the artisans and merchants in particular, against feudalism. There was a widespread revolt of the Carmathians in Delhi in the thirteenth century. Chroniclers of the times say that, after an attack on Jumma Masjid, "they were routed and every heretic and Carmathian sent to hell."

Although the Carmathians were practically wiped out, their views reappeared in one form or another from time to time. In the sixteenth century, the Roshaniya movement arose in the Punjab and the North-West Frontier under the influence of the Mahdis and the Carmathians.

The Roshaniya sect was founded by Bayazid who, after severe austerities in a cave, claimed to have received direct revelations from God and assumed the title of "Pir Roshan" or "the Guide of

Light." He demanded of his followers austere living and obedience to the Pir. The doctrines preached by him, according to J. Leyden, include the following:

"1. God is all in all, and all existing objects are only forms of his deity.

2. Human souls transmigrate into other bodies, and reappear in other forms, and such terms as resurrection, day of judgement, paradise and hell are only metaphors to express mundane things.

3. The Koran and Hadis (Islamic Traditions) are not to be interpreted literally or according to the apparent sense, but according to the mystic, secret or interior meaning. The ordinances of the law have therefore a mystical meaning, and are ordained only as a means of acquiring religious perfection.

4. This mystic sense of the law is only attainable by religious exercises and the instructions of the Pir; it is the source of religious perfection; and this perfection being attained, the exterior ordinances of the law cease to be binding, and are virtually annulled."[14]

"Pir Roshan" soon became a popular figure and his followers rapidly increased in number. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, he established his own rule in the regions of the Sulayman Hills and the Khyber in opposition to the Moghul government.

True, the movement was confined mainly to the Afghan tribes of North India. But, these tribes, "being democratic to a degree and fanatically attached to their liberty," soon became a serious threat to the mighty Moghul empire. Opposed to the introduction of feudal relations in their tribal structure, they conducted armed struggles against the Moghul government and Afghan feudal interests who supported it. They were very active all along the trade routes between India and Central Asia, and Akbar and his successor had to send many expeditions to subjugate them. According to Kennedy, the Roshaniyas who were the followers of Bayazid "had been preaching a special form of Muhammadanism,

[14]Quoted by Murray T. Titus: *Islam in India and Pakistan*, pp. 111-12.

in which communism on the one hand and the destruction of the enemies of Islam on the other, seem to have been two of the leading features."[18]

This description would be misleading, if one does not take note of the fact that, by "the enemies of Islam," the Roshaniyas meant mainly the Moghul rulers and their supporters. While they fought feudal lords belonging to Islam tooth and nail, the poorer sections among the Hindus were left unhurt. Of course, it was a religious movement based on the strict principles of Islam. And, although it had little to do with Communism, it certainly reflected the anti-feudal urges of the masses.

The importance of the Roshaniya movement, which shook North-West India in the sixteenth century, lies in the fact that it was one of the first national movements launched in a religious garb for the consolidation of the ethnical groups in the country and for the fulfilment of the popular desire for freedom from the feudal hold of the Moghuls. The movement, however, arose only where the tribal tradition was still strong and this perhaps accounted for its localised character.

These developments incensed the reactionary ulema who did everything in their power to undermine the influence of the heretics and to defend their own authority. When the Moghul rule was on the path of decline, the conflict between the progressive and reactionary forces of religion intensified. The liberal ideas of Akbar were never liked by the reactionaries who, after his death, launched a vigorous onslaught on hereticism. Dara Shikuh who had translated 52 Upanishads from Sanskrit and who had been sympathetic to Sufism and the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity was condemned as a heretic and executed. But, such religious persecutions did not retrieve the Moghul empire from its disastrous course; nor did they wipe out progressive ideas from the people's mind.

The teachings of these heretical sects of Islam strongly influenced the entire development of social thought of the later Middle Ages. Most of them arose during the reign of the Delhi Sultanate. But, they took on the character of a religio-political mass movement

[18]Kennedy: *History of the Great Moghuls*, p. 27.

against feudalism only when the Moghul empire entered its decaying stage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The struggles conducted by the heretics of Islam were not directed against Hinduism or the Hindus as a community. In fact, they allied themselves with many Hindu reformers who worked for a better social order. Although there was no merging of the two religious groups into a single community, there was undoubtedly an emotional solidarity between them during this period; for, most of the trends of hereticism among the Hindus and Muslims of this period had one character in common, the equality of all before God. This doctrine often led to the idea of social equality and, in certain cases, even economic equality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

WITH the decline of feudalism in India, Hinduism entered a stage of stagnation and spiritual degeneration. The scholastic representatives of the old order made frantic efforts to conserve the tottering social order with new interpretations of the Smritis and the Sastras. Scholars like Sayana, Madhava, Ananda Tirtha, Bhatta Bhaskara and a host of others, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, wrote a number of commentaries on the Vedas and other ancient works. Medhatithi, Kulluka Bhatta, Vijnaneswara, Hemadri and others came forward with their commentaries on the Manusmriti and other codifications of old laws and made desperate efforts to make them binding on the people of later feudalism. In the field of philosophy, many idealist commentaries were published and attempts were made to reinterpret the Samkhya, the Vaiseshika and other rational systems on the basis of idealism. The number of monasteries and temples increased and they played an effective role in blending philosophy, religion and theology. Feudal kings and nobles encouraged these efforts by their patronage and donations. It may be noted that, but for the lavish patronage of king Bukka Harihara, Sayana would not have written, in the fourteenth century, his famous commentaries on the Vedas.

In short, feverish attempts were made to give a fresh lease of life to the decadent religion by reviving the past. Vedic hymns were reintroduced during marriage ceremonies and other auspicious occasions. Yajnas too were revived. At the same time, many took refuge in Tantricism. In the name of reviving Tantric cults, many corrupt practices were resorted to by the conservative elements of society. However, new social and economic forces were also coming to the fore with new ideas and new religious precepts. This development was accelerated by the social and religious ideas which entered India in the wake of the Muslim invasions.

Referring to the great Reformation movement in Europe, Engels wrote: "The Middle Ages had attached to theology all the other

forms of ideology, philosophy, politics, jurisprudence, and made them subdivisions of theology. It, therefore, constrained every social and political movement to take on a theological form. To the masses, whose minds were fed with religion to the exclusion of all else, it was necessary to put forward their own interests in a religious guise in order to produce a great agitation."[1] This statement is equally applicable to India of the period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Indeed, the bhakti movement in India has many points of resemblance to the Reformation movement led by Wycliffe, Luther and Thomas Munzer. The keynote of the movement was bhakti (devotion) to Lord Vishnu and his avatars, Rama and Krishna. But, it was not a purely religious movement. The Vaishnavite doctrines were essentially the idealist manifestations of the socio-economic realities of the times. It expressed itself in the cultural field as a national renaissance; in its social content, it represented a revolt of great significance against domination and the injustices of the caste system. It gave a new impetus to the growth of diverse nationalities in India, to the development of national languages and their literature. The traders and craftsmen drew courage from this movement to stand firm against the feudal oppressors. The doctrine that all men, high and low, were equal before God became the central idea which rallied wide sections of the masses to fight the priesthood and caste tyranny. Thus, this great movement of the Middle Ages not only helped the development of a composite Indian culture embracing different linguistic and religious communities, but also paved the way for united struggles against feudal oppression.

The Vedantic doctrines of Ramanuja and his disciple, Ramananda, were the main source of inspiration for this reform movement. Ramanuja's assertion that it was possible for all men to attain communion with God and enjoy eternal bliss through bhakti laid the ideological basis for the new wave of activity. Ramananda travelled far and wide, attacking brahmin supremacy and the caste system. His simple maxim was: "Let no one ask a man's caste or sect; whoever adores God, is God's own." He had twelve disciples.

[1]Engels: *Ludwig Feurbach*, Ch. IV.

Of them, Raidas was a cobbler, Dharna an "untouchable" Jat peasant, Sena a barber, and Kabir a low caste weaver. This was the case with other religious reformers also. The great Tulsidas who lived in the time of Akbar was a brahmin by birth but he left his parents in his childhood to become a minstrel of God. Dadu, leader of the bhakti movement in Rajputana, was a low caste spinner. Nanak was the son of a small trader. The Marathi poet, Namadev, was a tailor, while Tukaram was a low caste trader. The great Bengali saint, Chaitanya, belonged to a poor family. Vemanna, the celebrated poet of Andhra, was an illiterate peasant. Thunchath Ezhuthachan, who composed the Malayalam versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and is acclaimed as the father of Malayalam literature, was a chakkala, an oil presser, low in the caste scale. Occasionally, some brahmins or other higher caste members also joined the movement, but they did so after giving up their caste privileges and superior attitudes. In short, nowhere was the bhakti movement led by the brahmin priesthood or high caste aristocracy.

The bhakti movement started at a time when a determined struggle against the domination of both Hindu and Muslim priests and the vested interests which they fostered became a historic necessity. The people, divided by territorial and parochial loyalties and demoralised by age-old superstition and oppression, had to be united and roused to uphold their interests and sense of dignity. The local dialects and regional languages had to be raised to the status of unifying national languages. These were some of the tasks that faced the leaders of the bhakti movement.

Essentially, the bhakti movement was born out of the social and economic conditions of India, though to a certain extent it was influenced by Sufism and other heretical doctrines of Islam. Many Hindu bhaktas had personal associations with Muslim heretics. "It is certain," wrote Macauliffe, "that Ramananda came in contact at Benares with learned Musalmans."[1] It is also certain that Ramananda's disciple, Kabir, went both to Hindu and Muslim teachers and listened to their discourses. Ranade has pointed out that the bhakti movement was indebted to the ideas of Islam

[1]Macauliffe : *The Sikh Religion*, VI, p. 102.

and that the influence of Islamic ideas was at work with great effect on the popular mind of Maharashtra, "where preachers, both brahmin and non-brahmin, were calling the people to identify Rama with Rahim, and ensure their freedom from the bonds of formal ritualism and caste distinctions, and unite in common love of man and faith in God."[8]

There was nothing strange in all this, because both Hindu and Muslim heretical ideas arose from the same socio-economic conditions and expressed the aspirations of the same classes of people.

The leaders of the bhakti movement were neither idle philosophers nor arm-chair social reformers. They were active among the people and earned their livelihood by hard work. Kabir, for instance, wove cloth and sold it in the market. He maintained that religious life did not mean idleness and that every devotee should toil and earn his livelihood and help others; he also stressed that man should lead a simple life, as he himself did, instead of hoarding wealth. Guru Nanak exhorted: "Touch not the feet of those who call themselves gurus and pirs and go begging. They who eat the fruit of their own labour and share it with others are the people who have found the right way."

The leaders of the bhakti movement demanded of their followers austerity and simplicity in their personal life, and righteousness, compassion and love in their social conduct. These qualities not only enriched human personality, but had a special importance in the context of feudal callousness and luxury.

In Europe, the Reformation movement sprang up first among the traders and artisans, though later it spread rapidly among the peasants. Engels, in his "Peasant War in Germany," has explained how the peasant revolt in Germany in 1525 was linked with the Reformation which supplied an ideological basis to it. In India, too, the bhakti movement was first confined to the townsfolk, especially to small traders, weavers, basket makers, water carriers and the like. But, by the seventeenth century, it had spread to the peasantry as well, developing into a mass movement and even armed revolts against feudal lords and the Moghul regime. The

[8] M. G. Ranade: *The Rise of the Maratha Power*, p. 55.

agitation among the Sikhs in Delhi in the seventeenth century and the armed agrarian revolt in Mathura had certain common bonds and inspiration. The bhakti movement in the Punjab played an active role in the struggle of the peasantry against Muslim feudalists. The part played by the poet, Tukaram, in the liberation movement under Shivaji's leadership, which swept Maharashtra like a mighty storm, was no small one. Another significant fact was that the leaders of this movement composed their poems and songs in the languages of the people, and not in the highbrow languages, Persian and Sanskrit. This encouraged the development of nationalities and national languages, a historic process in the evolution of Indian nationhood.

The bhakti movement attained varying degrees of intensity and sweep in different parts of the country. It appeared in a variety of forms also. Yet, some basic principles underlay the movement as a whole — first, recognition of the unity of the people irrespective of religious considerations; secondly, equality of all before God; thirdly, opposition to the caste system; fourthly, the faith that communion between God and man depended on the virtues of each individual, and not on his wealth or caste; fifthly, emphasis on devotion as the highest form of worship; and, finally, denigration of ritualism, idol-worship, pilgrimages, and all self-mortifications. The bhakti cult recognised the dignity of man and denounced all class and caste distinctions and social tyrannies rampant in the name of religion. "All the men and women of the world are His living forms," said Kabir. He taught: "Truth alone is natural. Seek this truth within your own heart, for, there is no truth in the external religious observances.... Truth is revealed in love, in strength, in compassion. Conquer hatred, and extend your love to all mankind, for God resides in all."

Some of his poems sang of the unity of Hindus and Muslims: "In all vessels, whether Hindu or Muslim, there is one soul." "Oh Allah, Rama, my illusion has passed away. There is no difference at all between Hindu and Mussalman."

Kabir condemned all caste distinctions based on birth: "How is it that one is born sudra and remains sudra till his death? One makes a brahmanic thread oneself, and then puts it on. The

world is, thus, in confusion. If thou art a brahmin, born of brahmin, why art thou not born in a different fashion? If you milk a black cow and a white cow, and then mix their milk, will you be able to distinguish the milk of one from that of the other?" Again, "those who talk of high and low are drowned. They have perished. There is one earth and only one potter; one is the creator of all; all the different forms are fashioned by one wheel."

Kabir ridiculed the religious rites of both Hindus and Muslims:

"There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places, and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them. The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak, I know, for I have cried aloud to them. The Puranas and the Karma are mere words, lifting the curtain I have seen. Kabir gives utterances to the words of experience, and he knows very well that all other things are untrue." (Adi Granth).

"The five prayers which the Musalman offers are all useless, because their prayers are a mere outward show and sham while they have some other thoughts all the time in their mind. By making a show of religious deeds, the Quasi deceives the poor people and does them harm instead of good."

Kabir's disciple, Dadu (1544-1603), who was a low caste spinner of Rajputana was also deeply influenced by Sufi ideas and, like his master, tried to blend Sufi mysticism and Hindu monism. He sang:

"You plead for the sects? The earth and sky,
Water and air, day and night, moon and sun,
Attend Him best. Of what sect are they?
Of none but the Unseen and Truthful, the great Lord."

Dadu founded an organisation called the Parabrahma Sampradaya with a view to uniting all the divergent faiths in one bond of love and fraternity and, like Kabir, admitted both Hindus and Muslims to his order.

Raidas, who earned his living as a cobbler, advocated complete

[4]*Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II.

surrender to God. "Hari is all and all is in Hari." In one of his songs, he exclaimed:

"Thou hast bound me by chains of illusion,
I have bound Thee with ropes of love;
I am making an effort to emancipate myself,
But when I attain freedom, then who will adore Thee?"

Chaitanya (1485-1533), the Vaishnava saint of Bengal, popularised Samkirtan, congregational singing of songs. He declared that all were eligible for worshipping God: "Leaving these temptations and the religious systems based on caste, the true Vaishnava helplessly takes refuge in Krishna," he said. "Chaitanya had disciples," wrote Tarachand, "from the lowest strata of Hindu society and from among Mussalmans, three of the principal ones, Ruj, Sanatan and Haridasa, being Muslims."

The feudal government, in the name of Islam, prohibited the community of devotional singing; still, the Samkirtan movement spread to every nook and corner of Bengal and became a source of inspiration for the people fighting for freedom.

Jnaneswar, who wrote a Marathi version of the Bhagavad Gita as early as 1290, was the originator of the bhakti movement in Maharashtra. Namadev (1270-1350), a friend of Jnaneswar, was opposed to all outward forms of religion. He said:

"The Hindu is blind and so is the Mussalman,
The Hindu worships in the temple and the Muslim in the mosque;
But Nama offers his worship to Him who needs neither temple nor mosque."

Tukaram (1601-1649) and Ramdas (1608-1681) had a powerful influence on Shivaji and inspired him in his struggle against the Moghul rule. The bhakti cult of the Maharashtra saints, as was pointed out by Ranade, "subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies, and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation, to the higher excellence of worship by means of love and faith. It checked the excess of polytheism."

Nanak (1469-1538), the first Guru of the Sikhs, was born the son of a Patwari or village accountant in a family of traders belonging

to the Khatri caste. Like other leaders of the bhakti movement, Nanak called upon the people to give up caste distinctions and preached that all were equal before God.

Among the Sikhs were not only traders and artisans of the towns but also peasants including low caste men. Nanak's teachings and the Sikh brotherhood gave a rallying point to the oppressed people. Nanak criticised the Hindu priests and the Muslim mullahs and exhorted his followers to oppose idolatry, ritualism, casteism, and pilgrimages. Service to God, he stated, meant good social activities. Sang Nanak:

"Religion consisteth not in mere words;
He who looketh on all men as equal is religious.
Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world;
Thus shalt thou find the way to religion."

Nanak stressed that there could be no love of God without loving man, especially the lowly:

"There are the lowest men among the low;
Nanak will go to them.
What has he got to do with the great?
God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly.
Nonsense is caste, and nonsense the titled fame.
What power has caste? Nobody is without some worth."

(Janam Sakhi)

The fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Arjun (1563-1606), compiled and edited Adi Granth which included Nanak's Japji as well as hymns of Kabir and other saints. He was the first to systematise the teachings of the earlier Gurus and to give an organisational form to the Sikh fraternity. His teachings were condemned as sedition and he was tortured and put to death by the Moghul rulers. The ninth Guru also met a similar fate at the hands of the Moghuls. Govind Singh (1675-1695), the next Guru, revised and reedited the Adi Granth. He is said to have declared: "My Sikhs shall obliterate the difference between the Hindus and Muslims, touchables and untouchables, high and low, and create one fraternity of men believing in the fatherhood of God."

Objectively, this emphasis on the unity of all people was in accordance with the historial necessity of putting an end to the petty social divisions based on castes and religions which had become thoroughly outmoded with the development of the internal market and consequent changes in economic relations. The theory of the equality of all souls before God expressed the new social consciousness of the peasant and the artisan fighting against feudal exploitation. The stress on the merits and virtues of the individual, as against the privileges of birth and lineage, also manifested the historic urge for "individual liberty" — the slogan of the new bourgeois class in the making. And such ideas, even in their religious sense, were undoubtedly progressive in the conditions of the Middle Ages when caste rivalries and superstitions had become obstacles to the further advancement of society.

The bhakti movement did not confine itself to raising its voice against blind superstition and the caste system, and proclaiming the equality of all men before God. Some of its leaders provided the leadership to the revolt of the traders, artisans and poor peasants against feudal oppression and Moghul domination and misrule.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Maharashtrians under the leadership of Shivaji (1627-1680) began their struggle against the Moghul rule. As already stated, the ground for this had been laid by the great Maharashtrian poets and bhakti leaders, Tukaram and Ramdas. The latter especially played a heroic role, breathing the spirit of revolt into the Maharashtra country. And, significantly, the hard core of Shivaji's freedom fighters was the peasantry. Led by their brilliant commander, these hardy peasants waged a type of guerilla warfare, attacking the Moghul army at places of their choice, and retreating to the thick forests of the Western Ghats when outnumbered. By 1674, most of Maharashtra had been liberated, and Shivaji was crowned the ruler of free Maharashtra.

The great rebellion of the Jat peasants in the Agra-Mathura region and the peasant struggles in Central India were also inspired by the bhakti movement. These struggles, born out of the discontent of the oppressed peasantry and the artisans and traders, hastened the downfall of the Moghul empire and the decay of feudalism.

The bhakti movement, however, had its own limitations. It is true that, through mass prayers, dances and community singing, the personality of the saint inspired the creative energy of the people. It awakened the masses to a new consciousness and generated a popular impulse to action. It considerably weakened the caste and religious exclusiveness of feudalism and gave an impetus to anti-feudal struggles. All this is true. But, the impulse for religion essentially comes through emotion and not reason. It is, therefore, incapable of either making a rational investigation of the social problems or giving a rational solution to them. The bhakti movement, for all it did to awaken the masses, failed to grasp the real causes of the maladjustment in the social and economic setup and to offer a radical cure to human suffering. This is one the main reasons why the movement which united the people against feudal despotism and priestly obscurantism ended up in rigid sectarianism. The evolution of Sikhism is a glaring example.

Sikhism originated as the ideology of the anti-feudal struggle. In the seventeenth century, in a situation tense with class conflicts, the Sikh movement took on the form of armed struggles against the Moghul rule. "The religious movement started by Nanak," observed Tarachand, "continued to gather momentum under his successors. Its stern ethical tone and its definite puritanism were elements which distinguished it from similar movements in India. The spirit of non-compromise carried within it possibilities of martyrdom and the seed of an organised church. The unsettled political conditions of the later period of the Moghul empire gave these possibilities their opportunity, and the seed bore fruit. The later Gurus were inevitably drawn into a militant society and boldly led the struggles of the peasants. But, although the Sikhs changed their organisation, their religion retained almost unaltered the impress of Guru Nanak's teaching."

The early Sikhs fought not only against the Moghul rulers, their chief enemies, but also against feudalism in general, both against Hindu and Muslim landlords. The traders and artisans — the forerunners of the bourgeoisie — and the peasants of the country-side were the motive force of the movement and the few individuals who came to it from the upper castes could not rise to a command-

ing position. But, slowly, the Sikh military leaders, the Sardars who led the people in the wars against the Moghuls, gained ascendancy. The decline of the Moghul rule and the declaration of independence of the Punjab in 1765 by the Gurumata, the council of the Sikh military chiefs, and the transfer of power to the Khalsa, the religious organisation of the Sikhs, marked the turning point in the history of Sikhism. The territory liberated from the Moghuls was divided among twelve misals or provinces. The land under the misals was considered to be the property of the Khalsa, but, in practice, the misals were independent territories held by the military chiefs. The land was further divided up among the Sirdars and their followers, the military leaders of lower ranks. The misal chiefs gradually changed themselves into feudal lords collecting rent from the peasants and duties from the traders. Thus, the bhakti movement of the Sikhs, which began under the leadership of Guru Nanak towards the end of the fifteenth century as a struggle against feudalism, gave way to another feudal establishment within the Sikh community in the middle of the eighteenth century. This development was intensified under British rule.

Still, the bhakti movement, which shook the entire country for more than two centuries, contributed much to the national awakening of the people — both Hindus and Muslims. That it could not succeed in abolishing the caste injustices and social inequalities, once for all, may be due to the fact that the artisans, traders and craftsmen who formed the main economic base of this movement were still weak and disorganised. And, before the rising bourgeoisie attained full growth as a class, the British capitalists had conquered the country and made it a part of their empire.

PART IV

MODERN THOUGHT IN INDIA

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF INDIA

EVEN before the advent of the Europeans, as we have seen, capitalist elements had emerged within Indian society. However, before they could gather strength and assert themselves, the more advanced and economically stronger foreigners came on the scene in a big way. The nascent national bourgeoisie could not hold its own against native feudalism or foreign colonialism. The foreigners — the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British — were engaged for a long time in a ruthless struggle for supremacy, often fighting openly against one another and sometimes covertly taking sides with the warring Indian princes. These bitter contests ended ultimately in the victory of the British.

"How came it," Marx asks, "that English supremacy was established in India?" And he himself gives the answer: "The paramount power of the Great Moghul was broken by the Moghul viceroys. The power of the viceroys was broken by the Marathas. The power of the Marathas was broken by the Afghans, and while all were struggling against all, the British rushed in and were enabled to subdue them all. A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste; a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members — such a country and such a society, were they not predestined prey of conquest?"[1]

The followers of Jesus Christ had come to the west coast of India, centuries before the first European traders of the bourgeois era set foot on Indian soil. But, they had come, not as conquerors, but as friendly bearers of the new gospel. And they, like the Muslims, had been assimilated into Indian society. Even the Moghuls, who had first come to India as conquerors, had lived and ruled only as Indians and not as foreigners. But, the British

[1]Karl Marx: *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, New York Tribune, August 8, 1853.

were different. They never got into the mainstream of Indian culture unlike the earlier invaders.

What was the reason for this difference? The foreigners who had occupied India prior to the British conquest — the Arabs, the Turks, the Moghuls and others — did not represent and bring with them an economic order superior to feudalism which had been the dominant social setup in India at that time. They had come from other Asian regions with backward economic systems and semi-feudal or feudal social structures. Therefore, they were incapable of effecting any change in the basic economic structure of Indian society, and they had necessarily to adapt their own way of life to Indian conditions. The conquerors, as often happened in history, were conquered by the superior civilisation of their subjects. The British, on the contrary, represented a system of productive activity more advanced than the prevalent feudal economy, *viz.* capitalism. That was why the British could change the basis of the Indian economic structure.

As is well known, the British first came to India with trade as their main purpose. The earning of profits by purchasing commodities in India and selling them in Europe was their declared objective. But, in the name of trade and commerce, they carried on the most unashamed loot and plunder of India's wealth and sent to England vast treasures year after year. This plunder was a powerful driving force that pushed forward the industrial revolution in England. It brought in its turn far-reaching changes in the social and economic setup in Britain. The industrial bourgeoisie pushed aside the mercantile bourgeoisie and became the most powerful class in British society. This again led to further changes in the relations between India and Britain.

The British resorted to every kind of trick to bring about the downfall of India's nascent industry. At first, they prevented the import of Indian cotton and silk products into their country in order to protect their own relatively backward manufacturers from Indian competition. Among the laws which they enacted for this purpose was one which prohibited the wearing of wrought silks and printed or dyed calicos from India, Persia and China, with a penalty of £ 200 on persons using or selling them. At the same time, various

measures were adopted by them in India, too, for hampering the Indian manufacturing industry. A time came inevitably when Indian manufacturers were no longer able to compete with English manufacturers who used new machines and more advanced techniques and undersold their products. And India, which had been an exporting country since time immemorial, was inundated with cheap British goods imported at a nominal duty to the ruin of the country's manufacturing industry. Millions of artisans and craftsmen lost their jobs and were forced to go to the villages, increasing the pressure on land.

Under the old system of revenue collection, revenue was a fixed share of the yield; but, when the yield was low owing to various causes, the taxes were proportionately reduced. But, under the British, tax was assessed in terms of money, irrespective of the quantum of produce. Peasants who were unable to find the necessary money were forced to mortgage or sell their land. Often, their land was sold in public auction for default of revenue payment. This led to the alienation of land on a big scale.

Thus began the breakup of the traditional agrarian system with the village community as its basic unit. The 1793 Act on Permanent Settlement and the 1818 Act on the Ryotwari System gave a death blow to the old village community setup, and created a new class of big landowners in India. The former Act handed over the common land to zamindars or tax collectors on condition that they paid a portion of their collections to the government. Under the Act on the Ryotwari System introduced in the Bombay and Madras presidencies, peasants who were members of the village communities were turned into tenants on government lands. As the rents were too high for the peasants, their lands gradually fell into the hands of profiteers and usurers who changed into landowners themselves. The hereditary leaseholders were ruined by the taxation and land policies of the East India Company, and their lands also went into the hands of usurers.

The result was growing misery for the peasantry and even for certain sections of the landowning class. The proportion of agricultural labourers in the population rose considerably. Artisans faced the collapse of their trades. Village craftsmen were ruined.

With growing indebtedness and impoverishment, frequent famines and epidemics, the fabric of social life began to crumble rapidly. The entire country seethed with discontent, while the money-lenders and big zamindars flourished at the expense of the peasants.

In course of time, the British converted India into an agricultural colony supplying raw materials to, and buying manufactured goods from, Britain. Agriculture, moreover, was oriented to the new tasks of production for the market, particularly the foreign markets. At the same time, exchange of commodities, money economy and capitalist relations of production made deep inroads into the tottering medieval feudal system. Whatever the motives of the British conquerors, the death blows they gave to feudalism helped India to come into line with modern progress. In the famous words of Marx, "England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by vilest interests and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution."[2]

When Marx wrote about the revolution brought about by the British capitalists in the social state of India, and about the regenerating role of British rule in India, he did not at all mean that the British colonialists would lead the Indian people forward along the path to social progress. He was only referring to the historical role of Britain in laying down the material basis for social progress in India. At the same time, he stated: "The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till, in Great Britain itself, the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the British yoke altogether."[3]

In order to convert India to an agrarian appendage of the British capitalist industry, the British ruling class was forced to introduce

[2]Karl Marx: *British Rule in India*, New York Tribune, June 25, 1853.

[3]Karl Marx: *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, New York Tribune, August 8, 1853.

railways in India. The economic and political effects of this new venture were far-reaching.

The first railway in India was introduced in 1853. In the same year, Marx wrote: "I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with the railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufacturers. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country which possesses iron and coals, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with railways. The railway system will, therefore, become in India truly the fore-runner of modern industry."[4]

The prediction of Marx about the consequences of the introduction of railways in India has been fully borne out by subsequent developments.

The immediate result of the rapacious policy followed by the alien colonialists was the creation of an atmosphere of stagnation and decadence in the cultural and social life of India. Economic exploitation and political humiliation led the people to passivity and despair. Yet, the hatred against British rule mounted up slowly, and the history of India moved on towards a phase of conflicts between the people and their foreign rulers.

In 1856, Lord Canning, who succeeded Lord Dalhousie as the Governor General of India, said at a banquet in London: "I wish for a peaceful term of office. But I cannot forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise no larger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin."

The clouds were already gathering as Canning spoke. Sporadic revolts were becoming more frequent. The Indian people, in fact, had never reconciled themselves completely to the foreign domination. Again and again, despite setbacks and periods of

[4] *Ibid.*

patient submission, Indians demonstrated, through popular struggles and movements, their firm opposition to the foreigners and their patriotic fervour.

It is true that some of the feudal chiefs and princes had surrendered to the British without the pretence of a fight, and some had shamelessly aligned with them to betray and defeat their fellow-rulers, out of jealousy. But, there were also princes and feudal nobles who courageously resisted the British.

A large number of agrarian revolts and struggles directed against British overlordship and feudal highhandedness took place in India between the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the War of Independence in 1857. The latter part of the eighteenth century saw the historic Sanyasi revolt of Bengal, which inspired great litterateurs like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee to create some of their best works. There were peasant revolts in Bareilly, Saharanpur, Delhi, Meerut, Muradabad and other regions in the early years of the nineteenth century. The Ramso revolts in Poona between 1822 and 1827, the Kole struggles of 1831-1832, the revolts of the indigo cultivators of Bengal between 1831 and 1847, the Sawantwadi mutiny of 1844, the peasant revolts in Kerala in 1847, 1851, 1852 and 1853, the Santal rebellion of 1855-1856 — these were spontaneous expressions of the people's will to resist the alien oppressors and their henchmen.

The unrest was not confined to the peasantry. Occasionally, there were mutinies among the Indian soldiers of the British army. The great rebellion of 1857 came as a climax to these waves of revolt which had been sweeping India for a long time.

The events of 1857 were not accidental occurrences as some historians would have us believe. The unscrupulous and arrogant policies followed by the British in every field of life — social, religious, political and economic—had roused strong feelings against them among the Indian people. The rebellion of 1857 was nothing less than an explosion of this pentup national anger.

On 29 March 1857, a young sepoy, Mangal Pandey, was exhorting his colleagues to rise against the foreigners when British officers arrested him. In the clash that followed, an officer was killed. Mangal Pandey was brought before a court martial and, on 8 April,

he was executed. This started off a wave of armed uprisings. The rebellion had begun.

The mutinous soldiers in Meerut crossed the Jumna river and marched to Delhi. In Delhi, Bahadur Shah was still nominally on the Moghul throne, a pitiful shadow of his mighty forefathers. On 10 May, however, the shadow suddenly came to life, for, the rebellious soldiers occupied Delhi and declared Bahadur Shah the Emperor of India. As Mr. Charles Bell has written in his "Indian Mutiny," the sepoys of Meerut in a moment found a leader, a standard and an aim. The mutiny was transformed into an insurrectionary war, an armed uprising of the people of India against the British rule.

This transformation took place with amazing speed. The peasants, dissatisfied with the taxation and land policies of the East India Company, were the backbone of the revolt. Hindus and Muslims, traders and artisans, all joined the revolt. Hindu sanyasins went round the countryside exhorting the people to fight the British. The ultimate objective of the revolt was the ending of British domination and the establishment of a free and centralised administration. As General Sir Robert Gardiner, a British officer, wrote in a confidential report: "The attempt to picture the Indian revolt as a mere soldiers' mutiny would be covering up the misrule which was definitely leading to a social upheaval."

The British made every attempt to divide the popular ranks by creating Hindu-Muslim discord. But, they failed, for, the upsurge of patriotism had strengthened the unity of the people. Bahadur Shah boldly exposed the conspiracies that were being hatched to divert the anti-British feelings of the Muslims against the Hindus, and declared : "This sacred war is against the British. I order that it shall not be directed against the Hindus."

As a gesture of goodwill to the Hindus, Bahadur Shah ordered the Muslims to desist from slaughtering cows during the Id celebrations. The leaders of the uprising realised the common interest in ending the British rule in India. A manifesto issued by them from Lucknow stated: "All Hindus and Muslims know that there are four vital interests dear to one and all. They are religion, honour, life and property. These can be saved only under a National Government."

"Before this," Marx wrote on 30 June 1857, "there had been mutinees in the Indian army, but the present revolt is distinguished by characteristic and fatal features. It is the first time that Sepoy regiments have murdered their European officers, that Mussalmans and Hindus, renouncing their mutual antipathies, have combined against their common masters, that disturbances beginning with the Hindus have actually ended in placing on the throne of Delhi a Mohammedan Emperor, that the mutiny has not been confined to a few localities, and lastly, that the revolt in the Anglo-Indian army has coincided with a general disaffection exhibited against English supremacy on the part of the great Asiatic Nations, the revolt of the Bengal army being, beyond doubt, intimately connected with the Persian and Chinese wars."[5]

On 4 June, Lucknoww as liberated. Within ninety days, Oudh and Rohilkhand were free. The flag of freedom fluttered over Kanpur and Bundelkhand. The British rule over the vast area from Calcutta to Peshawar and from the Himalayas to the river Narmada had been swept away.

Leaders of the revolt like Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Maulvi Ahmed Shah of Fyzabad, Kunwar Singh, Tantia Tope, Nana Saheb and Feroze Shah were feudal princes, while others were military commanders. The Rani of Jhansi fought with amazing courage. She roused the soldiers and the people to heroic endeavour and personally led them in battle. On 17 June 1857, a British bullet hit her and she fell down from her horse and died within half an hour. Even today the valiant Rani lives in the hearts of the Indin people, celebrated in ballads and folk songs.

The British, for political and tactical reasons, directed their main efforts towards recapturing Delhi. But, it was not an easy task. With all their modernised equipment and superior military experience, it was after four months of siege and a five-day hand-to-hand fight within the city walls that they succeeded in occupying Delhi. This happened on 24 September 1857. Yet, Lucknow held on, and the resistance there was overcome only on 20 March 1858. Tantia Tope and his guerilla units refused to acknowledge defeat for some time. On 7 April, he too was captured and, on the 18th,

[5]Karl Marx: *The Revolt in the Indian Army.*

he was executed. Thus ended India's first war of independence, which shook the very foundations of British rule in India. British chroniclers themselves have recorded eye-witness accounts of the atrocities committed by the rulers in suppressing the rebellious Indians. Edward Thompson, for instance, has described how the British, after repeatedly bayoneting a wounded prisoner in the face, burnt him alive over a slow fire; "the horrible smell of his burning flesh, as it cracked and blackened in the flames, rising up and poisoning the air. So, in this nineteenth century with its boasted civilization and humanity, a human being should lie roasting and consuming to death."[6]

The common people — the peasantry, the soldiers and the artisans — were in the thick of the struggle and their unflinching courage was a big factor that inspired the feudal chiefs and the princes to challenge the British. These leaders, in most cases, had been dissatisfied with the annexationist policy of the East India Company administration and motivated by the desire to regain their power. Yet, the national character of the revolt of 1857 cannot be denied just because of the feudal element in its leadership. Such paradoxes are not unknown in world history. As Marx pointed out, the first blows against the French monarchy were struck not by the peasants, but by some feudal lords. In India, the soldiers of the Indian army had initiated the 1857 revolt. Yet, it was not a mutiny of the armed forces only, but a powerful struggle with a broad national character. It was waged against the British occupation of India, and in favour of Indian freedom.

There were admittedly certain cowardly and anti-national ruling princes who sided with the British. The Maharajas of Patiala, Kapurthala and Nepal led their armies against the national rebellion. There were those who wavered also. Some of them entered the fray only under the pressure of public opinion. The British Governor-General, Lord Canning, at a critical juncture of the rebellion stated: "If the Scindia joins the revolt, I will have to pack up tomorrow itself." When the tide was turning against the revolutionaries, prince after prince betrayed the cause and went

[6]Edward Thompson: *The Other Side of the Medal.*

over to the British. Indeed, the British political agent in the North-West Frontier Province could record this in a letter dated 19 August 1857: "I am beginning to get letters from Indian Rajahs declaring that they have been always on our side and enquiring us as to what they can do for us."

Apart from the treachery of the princes and feudal lords, the reasons for the failure of the insurrection were inferior military strength, the absence of a single, centralised leadership and internal strife. 1857, however, left its indelible mark on the history of India. Its memories inspired new generations of Indians to carry on the struggle for freedom.

England also realised that she could not hold down the Indian people for long by military might alone. So, it was decided to change the administrative patterns. Parliament ended the rule of the East India Company and took over the administration in its own hands. Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India. A new policy of winning over the Indian princes to strengthen Britain's grip over India was adopted. Queen Victoria declared: "We shall protect the rights, the dignity and the honour of Indian princes, with the same interest attached to our own affairs."

But, India did not consist of just a few princes. Her future was in the hands of the people who had shown in 1857 that they would not bend their knees before foreign rule. "The brutality of the Mutiny," wrote Michael Edwards, "and the indifference of the administrations that followed it, destroyed any chance of compromise between the Indian and the English. The Indian Government was nakedly an imperial Government, an alien tyranny that would never be absorbed as the Moghuls had been. The cleavage between the rulers and the ruled became precise, and Indians felt a sense of solidarity, the beginnings of nationhood. Nothing then could impede the decay of the Empire."[7]

[7]W.H. Russel: *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, p. xxiii.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE IMPACT OF WESTERN THOUGHT

THE British capitalist class, as already stated, adopted a policy of stifling and retarding the growth of any national industry in India. They wanted to keep the country as a consumer of goods manufactured in Britain and as a supplier of raw materials to British industrial concerns.

But this policy of exploitation had its own contradictions. Every measure adopted for the consolidation of British rule contained germs of its destruction also. The railways, steam navigation and electric telegraph, for example, were introduced in India to serve Britain's imperial interests. They were used to open up the the country for British commerce and industry and to facilitate the transport of British troops to any place threatened by "native revolts." But, modern communications also helped the geographical and political unification of India, ending the age-old isolation of its various regions and communities. Similarly, the British policy of preventing the growth of Indian capital and industry indirectly led to the emergence of an Indian bourgeois class.

Marx observed: "The ruling classes of Great Britain have had, till now, but an accidental, transitory and exceptional interest in the progress of India. The aristocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy to plunder it and the millocracy to undersell it. But now the tables are turned. The millocracy have discovered that the transformation of India into a reproductive country has become of vital importance to them, and that, to that end, it is necessary above all to fight her with means of irrigation and of internal communication. They intend now drawing a net of railroads over India. And they will do it. The result must be inappreciable.... Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power."[1] Thus, along with her destructive activities,

[1]Karl Marx: *The Future Results of British Rule in India.*

Britain in India played also a regenerating role, in a historical sense.

In the early stages of their rule in India, the British capitalists were more concerned with their own profits than with the increase in the number of Christian souls. The East India Company encouraged neither modern education and social reforms nor evangelism. They even issued instructions to the effect that there should be no interference with native habits and religious customs. But, after their victory at Plassey in 1757, there was a marked change in their policy. The pressure of the Church induced the British Parliament to initiate moral improvement of "their subjects" with the support of Christian missionaries. The farsighted among the politicians had begun to realise that modern education and social reforms were necessary for the development of Indian markets.

The change of policy gave a new impetus to the missionary movement in India. The ruling class saw in Christianity a means to foster loyalty and subordination to the Empire. They, therefore, encouraged the activities of the Christian missionaries with a view to winning over the mind of the Indian people. Large sums of money were placed at their disposal. Christians gradually began to be considered superior to Hindus and Muslims and were given special favour. Government employees who embraced Christianity were promoted to higher posts. All this naturally hurt the religious sentiments of the people of India, especially the Hindus and Muslims. The British rulers might also have calculated that their policy of encouraging Christianity in India would make them more popular among the British people. Mangles, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the East India Company, stated in the British Parliament in 1857: "Providence has entrusted the extensive empire of Hindustan to England that the banner of Christ should wave triumphant from one end of India to the other. Every one must exert all his strength that there may be no dilatoriness on any account in continuing in the country the work of making all India Christian."[1]

A British administrator of Bombay remarked that the role of the missionaries in the consolidation of British rule in India was more valuable than the services rendered by the governors and judges and military officers of the administration. Sir Charles Eliot,

[1] *Savarkar*, pp. 51, 52.

Governor of Bengal, hailed the missionaries for their unofficial and unrecognised work in justifying English rule in India. Deliberate attempts were made to create dissensions among Hindus, Muslims and Christians in India.

The policy of encouragement to missionaries was accompanied by the introduction of judicial codes designed to perpetuate caste divisions, superstition and outmoded customs. Separate laws and codes were drawn up and maintained for the Hindus and the Muslims. Obsolete customs and decadent social taboos were sought to be maintained by endowing them with judicial sanctions. Indians were generally treated with contempt.

Munroe wrote frankly in 1818: "Foeign conquerors have treated the natives with violence, and often with great cruelty, but none have treated them with so much scorn as we; none have stigmatised the whole people as unworthy of trust, as incapable of honesty, and as fit to be employed only where we cannot do without them. It seems to be not only ungenerous, but impolite, to debase the character of a people fallen under our dominion."

But, this was only one side of the picture. The zeal with which the missionaries conducted their campaign against the caste system in general, and untouchability and unapproachability in particular, against idol worship, child marriage and widow-burning and other religious customs roused the social consciousness of the people of India. Thus, William Carey and other learned missionaries attracted many Hindus and Muslims who readily allowed themselves to be converted to Christianity. In order to make their work more effective, many missionaries studied Indian languages, wrote books, translated a number of religious and philosophical works from Sanskrit, conducted researches on the history and culture of India and established schools and hospitals on modern lines to serve the people. Though such educational and social activities were often bound up with evangelism, the positive significance of their work cannot be exaggerated. They helped to initiate new patterns of thinking and activity in India. "It must be confessed," observed D.S. Sarma, "that the emphasis which our religious leaders, especially those belong to the Samaj movement and the Ramakrishna Mission, have laid on social service is due to the object lesson

provided by Christian missions."[8] It may be mentioned here that some of the greatest social and religious reformers in India like Swami Vivekananda were educated in Christian colleges.

Innumerable books and pamphlets dealing with the Christian religion were published in English and the various languages of India, and they had a profound influence on the Indian social reformers. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, for instance, considered the ethical precepts contained in the New Testament as "admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of one God who has equally subjected all living creatures, without distinction of caste, rank, or wealth to change, disappointment, pain and death and has equally admitted all to be partakers of the bountiful mercies which He has lavished over nature and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves, and to society."

The caste distinctions, idolatry, child marriage, infanticide, sati and other obnoxious customs of the Hindus must have shocked the conscience of the early Christian missionaries and they played a not too insignificant role in the struggle against such customs. But, like the Muslims in India in the earlier period, Christianity also began to accommodate itself to the prevailing social environment. It succumbed to the caste system and adopted many Hindu rituals and customs. Dinstinctions between the lower castes and the higher castes, which prevailed among the Hindus, were maintained intact even after their conversion to Christianity. These later changes, however, do not detract from the importance of the pioneering work done by the Christian missionaries in India.

Education was a subtle weapon used by the British to consolidate their dominion in India. It was at once a system to train the natives to be loyal servants of the crown and an effective means to propagate Western ways of life and ideas. They thought that the new system of English education imparting academic instruction in the humanities and sciences would help to foster a feeling of inferiority among the people and a contempt for their own culture and traditions, which was necessary to glorify British rule. Lord Macaulay's "Minute on Education," written in 1834, reflected the

[8]D.S. Sharma: *Renaissance of Hinduism*, Benares, 1944, p. 639.

contemptuous manner in which the new ruling class treated the age-old Indian traditions and culture and the various Indian languages. He maintained that "the dialects commonly spoken among the natives" were "poor and rude," that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could never be compared to that of "the great European nations," and that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." He praised the intrinsic superiority of his own language and asserted that "all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England," and that "in every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same."[4]

Answering the criticism of the small section of "Orientalists" led by William Jones and others who highly valued Indian classical heritage and who feared that the policy of the "Anglicists" would hurt the feelings and sensibilities of the upper classes in Indian society, Macaulay wrote as follows: "It is said that the Sanskrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement. Assuredly, it is the duty of the British government in India to be not only tolerant but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value, only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are to teach it because it is fruitful of monstrous superstitions. We are to teach false history, false religion. We abstain, and I trust, shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity. And while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the state to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves

[4] *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 596-97.

after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?"[5]

The aim of the new system of education was explained by Macaulay in a nutshell in the last paragraph of his Minute: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[6]

The British rulers hoped that Western education would demolish "Indian superstitions" and spell the end of native religions and the age-old culture of India. Despite his opposition to evangelism, Macaulay stated in a letter written by him to his mother in 1836 that, within thirty years of the introduction of his new system of education, not a single idolater would be left in Bengal.

Hunter was even more optimistic: "No young man, whether Hindu or Muhammadan, passes through our Anglo-Indian schools without learning to disbelieve the faith of his fathers. The luxuriant religions of Asia shrivel into dry sticks when brought into contact with the realities of Western Science."

In short, educational reforms were introduced for parading British greatness. The colonialists had hoped that "the enlightenment due to education would reconcile the people to British rule and even engender a sense of attachment to it,"[7] and that, as Elphinstone put it, English education "would make the Indian people gladly accept British rule." But, this turned out to be a gross miscalculation. The British policy was marked inevitably by certain irreconcilable contradictions. The aim was destruction but the result was regeneration. The new system of education sought to strangle the soul of India, but was actually sowing the seeds of an upheaval which ultimately did away with the British rule itself.

English education opened out to Indian intellectuals new vistas of social and political freedom. Educated Indians began, on the one hand, to appreciate progressive ideas and the scientific achievements of other countries, and, on the other, to examine critically their own traditions, religion, philosophy, customs and habits in

[5]*Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 600. [6]Macaulay: *Prose and Poetry*, p. 724-29.
[7]O. Malley: *Modern India and the West*, p. 658.

the light of the new knowledge. Macaulay had thought that his educational system would undermine the national consciousness of Indians and make them loyal slaves. But, it actually laid the basis for a scientific approach to life, and also helped a new national awakening. The educational policy of the British, in other words, produced a new class of Indian intellectuals who eagerly absorbed the essentials of Western science and the more advanced cultural standards of the West, and tried to utilise them for the progress of their own motherland.

Throughout the world, the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a rising class has been accompanied by new watchwords signifying new social needs such as freedom of conscience, freedom of faith, individual liberty, the right to earn and accumulate property, and the right to employ labour. The appearance of such ideas in India, too, was inevitable. The introduction of Western education with its stress on science and humanities and a liberal political philosophy facilitated the development in India of a new pattern of thinking—rationalism, liberalism, freedom and democracy, humanism and egalitarian ideals. The stimulus provided to modern Indian thought by great Western writers and thinkers like Shelley, Byron, Cobden, Mill, Spencer, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morley, Milton, Locke and Burke cannot be underestimated. In fact, Western thought had a decisive role in moulding the mind of modern India.

The British rulers and their supporters had painted the national languages and cultures of India in the darkest colours. Still, many of the "educated Indians" coming out of the new colleges became ardent lovers of their own languages and cultures and devoted their lives to serve them. The arrogance and superior airs of the British only roused in the enslaved Indian people a new pride and an awareness of their cultural inheritance. Many European and Indian scholars delved deep into the past and produced original works as well as translations of Sanskrit classics to show that the Indian culture was not inferior to that of any other country. Thus, contrary to the expectations of the British imperialists, patriotic sentiments and progressive ideas began to stir in Indian minds and, in course of time, they influenced the literature, philosophy and political thought of India.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY

THE anti-feudal, anti-colonial movement of the nineteenth century had its own limitations, determined chiefly by the general economic backwardness of the country and the supremacy of the British rulers in India. The British ruling class, who wanted to maintain India as an agrarian appendage to the metropolitan country for the supply of raw materials for their industries and for dumping British industrial products, tried their utmost to prevent India from developing as a modern, industrialised nation. They developed in India only such branches of industry as were necessary for supporting British industries or were not against the interests of Britain. The weak, incipient, national bourgeoisie, who aspired and worked for the establishment of capitalist relations, had to fight against heavy odds to find a place in the sun. It was natural under such conditions if many representatives of the Indian bourgeoisie felt that their aspirations could be fulfilled, not by a revolutionary war against foreign domination, but with the help and patronage of the British bourgeoisie. The working class had not yet appeared on the historical arena as a politically mature and class-conscious, independent force, capable of leading the people with its own ideology. Feudalism and its ideology were still strong and the incipient bourgeois elements were themselves tied up in feudal relations. The burden of the past still weighed heavily on them. Uneven development of the country complicated the situation further. While capitalist industries began to develop in coastal provinces like Bengal, Bombay and Madras, mainly through the activities of British capitalism, vast areas remained under feudal and prefeudal conditions. Even in the towns where modern education and scientific ideas had made some headway, precapitalist modes still survived in social relations and in the pattern of thinking.

These factors partly explain the continued hold of religion

on the people of India through the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. Religion played an exceptional role in the anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. National awakening expressed itself as a reflection of religious awakening. In the initial stages, religious consciousness itself was a reflection of political consciousness. Social and political notions, democratic and patriotic aspirations, hopes for a better life, were all expressed in religious forms. Thus, the Indian Renaissance initiated by social reformers in the nineteenth century was not aimed at a complete break with religion. It was based on an opposition to outmoded religious customs and practices, on the one hand, and on a reinterpretation and revitalisation of religion to suit the new conditions, on the other. Thus, the struggle for the development of capitalism and modern civilisation in India was inseparably linked with the religious approach. Nevertheless, Hinduism of this period was not the same as the Hinduism of the feudal era. It bore the imprint of the times and was vastly different from what Sankara, Sayana and Medhathithi had made of it. It reflected the aspirations of a weak bourgeois class economically bound to the past, admiring various features of British capitalism and struggling to become stronger and richer. The social reformers bowed to religious traditions, but not to those obsolete elements of institutionalised religion which hindered the development of new productive forces. They sincerely bleieved that, by fighting caste distinctions and untouchability, idol worship and the practice of sati, and by advocating widow remarriage and intercaste marriage, they were reviving and purifying the old religion. But, actually, they were preparing the ground for new religious ideas and new social relations suited to the development of the capitalist mode of production. It was a period when every political and social activity had a religious motivation. Under such conditions, the revival of religious and moral ideals became an act of patriotic faith.

The movements for religious and social reforms, which played a significant role in the national awakening in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were ideologically based on metaphysical, medieval and unscientific concepts. Yet, their content

was basically anti-feudal and anti-colonialist. They inspired the people to work towards the goal of ending the outmoded social relations and creating new relations and ideas. Thus, in spite of their restrictive idealism which put a curb on a rational and scientific approach to reality, they played a progressive role in history. In effect, they were answering the call of the future although they believed that they were revitalising the old values. Every national renaissance has this tendency to play up the achievements of the past. This nostalgia was a notable feature even of the French Renaissance and the British Reformation. In India too, the political and economic content of nascent nationalism expressed itself in the form of religious reform and developed as a movement for national renaissance, repudiating the outmoded customs and religious superstitions represented by reactionary social forces. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first outstanding leader of this movement, and, for this reason, has been hailed as the father of modern Indian nationalism. As Rabindranath Tagore put it, it was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who ushered in the modern epoch in India.

Though the principles of Islam and Christianity had exerted a profound influence on his mind, Ram Mohan Roy's basic approach was that of Hinduism. He was prepared to accept the moral principles of the New Testament, but, he opposed the missionaries' attempt at proselytisation. He complained that the British rulers had violated their pledge of religious neutrality by encouraging Christian missionaries to write books ridiculing the Hindu and Muslim faiths. At the same time, he vehemently opposed many customs and beliefs of the decadent social system. He did not accept the prevalent dogmas of the Hindus regarding their numerous gods and rituals, their concept of rebirth and avatars, and their practice of idol worship, animal sacrifices and sati. Hinduism, as he understood it, was rooted in a broad humanist outlook. And, therefore, he set himself the task of purifying Hinduism and sweeping away from it the cobwebs of superstitions which had accumulated through the ages. He wanted Hinduism regenerated as a truly national religion suited to the new conditions of social life.

Ram Mohan opposed polytheistic ritualism and upheld monism. According to him, "turning towards one Eternal Being is a natural tendency of human mind." He used Vedantic monism as a weapon in his struggle against orthodoxy and as a lever to raise the people to a higher, nobler life. He even dreamt of a universal religion based on faith in one single Godhead and the recognition of human values. He called upon the people to give up idolatry and polytheistic ritualism and to worship only the pure, formless Brahman, which meant realisation of God in every human being. To him, monism was the symbol of India's unity. The rich heritage of the humanistic outlook of Kabir, Chaitanya and other theistic saints of the bhakti movement, which was itself based on Upanishadic monism propounded by Vedantists like Ramanuja and Ramananda, also appealed to Ram Mohan. In this sense, the movement initiated by Ram Mohan was a continuation of the bhakti movement. But, it would be wrong to look at it merely as the continuation of an earlier movement. For, Ram Mohan's monism had been further strengthened by the monotheistic outlook of both Islam and Christianity. He sought to assimilate the new values created by Western science and to blend them with the traditional values of India so as to meet the challenge of the new age. He wrote in 1928: " I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and subdivisions among them has entirely deprived them of political feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. It is, I think, necessary that some changes should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort."

It is not surprising that there was widespread opposition to his new ideas. Reactionary brahmin pundits and some of the Christian missionaries opposed him with all their might and even slandered him. As Romain Rolland observed, Ram Mohan was "no more chained to orthodox Christianity than to orthodox Hinduism, although he believed that he had discovered its real

meaning. He remained an independent theist, essentially a rationalist and moralist. He extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but he rejected the divinity of Christ just as he rejected Hindu incarnations. As a passionate unitarian, he attacked the trinity no less than polytheism, hence, both brahmins and missionaries were united against him." But, gradually, Ram Mohan's progressive ideas won more and more adherents. In his autobiographical sketch, Ram Mohan Roy himself recalls how his activities angered the conservative elements in society: "My continued controversies with the Brahmins on the subject of their idolatry and superstition, and my interference with their customs of burning widows, and other pernicious practices, revived and increased their animosity against me, and through their influence with my family, my father was again obliged to withdraw his countenance openly, though his limited pecuniary support was still continued to me."[1] But, he continues: "Notwithstanding the violence of the opposition and resistance to my opinions, several highly respectable persons, both among my own relations and others, began to adopt the same sentiments."[2]

Roy was the founder of nationalist journalism in India. He founded the Bengali journal "Sambad Kaumadi" in 1821 and the Persian paper "Ul Akbar" in 1822. Both these journals carried the message of national awakening. The British, who looked askance at any attempt to develop nationalist journalism, launched repressive measures against these papers. As early as 1799, the Government had imposed strict censorship on the press. Lord Hastings, in 1817, yielded to public agitation, to some extent, and abolished the censorship, but at the same time laid down many restrictive regulations. Adam, who succeeded him, issued ordinances prohibiting the publication of journals and newspapers without a Government licence. Ram Mohan Roy organised a strong agitation against these measures and finally succeeded in the campaign.

His journals carried the message of national renaissance to all

[1]Raja Rao and Iqbal Singh (ed.): *Changing India*, p. 18.
[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 18-9.

parts of the country. Through their columns, he carried on a relentless struggle against the relics of a bygone age—the caste system, idol worship, animal sacrifices, etc. His was the message of humanism and universal brotherhood.

The heartless medieval custom known as sati which forced widows to commit suicide by jumping into the funeral pyres of their husbands was still prevalent in some parts of the country, especially in Bengal. Ram Mohan himself had the shocking experience of helplessly watching the sacrifice of his sister-in-law on the funeral pyre of his brother. No wonder that he became the foremost opponent of this barbarous practice. It was a time when the Indian mind demanded religious sanction even for social reforms. It had to be proved that abolition of sati was in accordance with the Sastras and Smritis. So, quoting the scriptures, Ram Mohan marshalled arguments to prove that this custom had neither moral nor religious sanction behind it. It must be noted that some eminent Christian missionaries like William Carey and his Serampore colleagues encouraged and assisted Roy in his noble efforts. But, public opinion in England was divided. The dominant section in the ruling class did not like to antagonise the conservative Hindu pundits according to whom "the practice of widows burning themselves with the bodies of their husbands is founded on the religious notions of the Hindus, and is expressly stated with approbation in their law."[3] The British Government of India accepted the interpretations of Sastras made by orthodox Hindu pundits and resolved to permit the practice of sati wherever it was allowed by religion.

But, to the enlightened mind, both Indian and European, sati appeared as a barbarous and inhuman custom. As a result of pressure of public opinion, instructions were issued in 1813 to the effect that no sati should be conducted without official permission and that it should be conducted in the presence of a police officer! This was tantamount to giving police protection to "legitimate Satis" and the result was an immediate increase in the number of sacrifices.

[3]Quoted in Jatindra Kumar Majumdar (ed.): *Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Progressive Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1941.

H. Ookley, who had been Collector of Hooghly, observed in 1818: "Police officers are now ordered to interfere, for the purpose of ascertaining that the ceremony is performed in conformity with rules of Sastras... This is granting the authority of the Government to the burning of widows, and it can scarcely be wondered at that the number of sacrifices should have doubled when the sanction of the ruling power is added to the recommendation of the Sastras."

Such measures, however, could not shake Ram Mohan's resolve. He continued his agitation with renewed vigour. In 1818, he submitted a memorandum in which he declared that sati sacrifices were, in fact, "murders according to every Sastra, as well as the commonsense of all nations." He exposed the economic motives behind the custom and pointed out that the selfish desire to avoid sharing a dead man's properties with his widow was the main motive of the orthodox pundits. His agitation attracted the support of many englightened people. A group of prominent Hindus submitted another petition in 1819. The campaign became so widespread that, at last in 1829, sati was declared illegal by the regime of Lord William Bentinck.

The removal of the disabilities of women in social life was another important issue which received Roy's special attention. He stood for the granting of equal property rights to men and women, and campaigned in favour of widow remarriage and against child marriage.

Ram Mohan gave his powerful support to the introduction of modern education. The demand for preserving the traditional system without change, and for the adoption of Sanskrit and Arabic as the media of instruction, was being voiced by certain scholars of the period. The Brtisih Governor-General, Warren Hastings, had backed these suggestions. But, Ram Mohan Roy, pointing out the inadequacy of the old educational system in the changed conditions of life, stressed the need for the new Western type of education; for, he saw it as a vehicle of modern thought that could bring to the Indian people the vast advances made by the West in science, social reform and politics. It was largely due to his untiring efforts that, in 1917, the Hindu College (later renamed

Presidency College) was established. In his memorandum to Lord Amherst (Governor-General-in-Council), presented in 1823, he criticised the Orientalist conception of education "calculated to keep this country in darkness" and pleaded for the promotion of a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, "embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences, which may be accomplished with the sums proposed by employing a new generation of talent and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments, and other apparatus."

This campaign also bore fruit. A decade later, Lord Macaulay introduced the new type of schools in India, much on the lines suggested by Roy.

Another important struggle conducted by Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the one against the Jury Act of 1827. The mischievous nature of the Act, and the significance of Ram Mohan's campaign against it, may be observed from the following extract: "In his famous Jury Bill, Mr. Wynn, the late President of the Board of Control, has by introducing religious distinctions into the judicial system of this country not only afforded just grounds for dissatisfaction among the natives in general, but has excited much alarm in the breast of everyone conversant with political principles. Any natives, either Hindu or Muhammadan, are rendered by this Bill subject to judicial trial by Christians, either European or native; while Christians, including native converts, are exempted from the degradation of being tried either by a Hindu or Mussalman juror, however high he may stand in the estimation of society. This Bill also denies both to Hindus and Muhammadans the honour of a seat on the Grand Jury even in the trial of fellow Hindus or Mussalmans. This is the sum total of Mr. Wynn's late Jury Bill, of which we bitterly complain."[4]

But, by far the most important contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the Brahmo Samaj which he founded in 1828 with the object of giving centralised guidance to the movements for religious and social reforms. Despite opposition from conservative

[4]Quoted in Choudhri, Majumdar and Datta: *An Advanced History of India*, p. 814.

elements, the Samaj earned much goodwill and attracted the intellectual *elite* of Bengal. It opposed idolatry, untouchability, the caste system and religious fanaticism and advocated widow remarriage and intercaste marriage. The diverse activities of the Samaj gave a great impetus both to the social reform movement and the national awakening of India. The Samaj was a creative endeavour to free the social conscience from the stifling grip of conservative thinking, and, thus, to make the people respond to the call of the times. The two complementary concepts of the philosophy of Brahmo Samaj were faith in a single Godhead and the brotherhood of man. The concept of the brotherhood of man led to efforts towards removing of social evils and sectarian distinctions imposed by the Hindu orthodoxy, while the concept of monotheism reflected the urge for a synthesis of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Thus, the Brahmo Samaj was not purely a religious reform movement; for, in those days, social and political progress was inseparably linked with religious reform. By its popularisation of the ideals of individual freedom, national unity and liberation of social institutions and social relations, the Brahmo Samaj movement undoubtedly played a great role in quickening the forces of national regeneration which later found political expression in the Indian National Congress formed in 1885. After the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1833, his good work was carried on by such eminent leaders as Debendranath Tagore (1817-1907) and Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). Under them, the Brahmo Samaj movement grew in intensity and sweep. Clarifying its objectives, Debendranath Tagore affirmed that reliance on reason rather than on infallible scriptures was the basis of the Brahmo faith. In the Brahmo Samaj covenant composed by him in 1843, the following precepts were included: "God is a personal being with sublime moral attributes. God has never been incarnated. God hears and answers prayer. Temples and fixed forms of worship are unnecessary. Men of all castes and races may worship God acceptably. Nature and intuition are the sources of knowledge of God. No book is authoritative."

Explanaining how the Brahmo Samaj differed from the orthodox Hinduism, he observed: "Our first point of distinction is in

the positive aspect of our creed wherein worship is defined as consisting in loving Him and doing the works He loveth.... The negative aspect of our creed, which prohibits the worship of any created being or thing as the creator, further distinguishes us from all who are addicted to the worship of avatars or incarnations, or who believe in the necessity of mediators, symbols, or idols of any description. We base our faith on the fundamental truths of religion, attested by reason and conscience, and refuse to permit man, book or image to stand in the way of the direct communion of our soul with the Supreme Spirit."

Some writers have remarked that Keshab Chandra Sen took Brahmo Samaj closer to Christianity. It is true that Christianity exerted a great influence on him. But, he opposed the dogmas of the Christian faith as vigorously as he opposed the dogmas of Hinduism. He said: "Christianity has failed to produce any wholesome moral influence on my countrymen, yet their muscular Christianity has led many a native to idenitify the religion of Jesus with the power and privilege of inflicting blows and kicks with impunity. And thus Jesus has been dishonoured in India."

Kehsab Chandra Sen dreamt of a universal religion in order to unite the East and the West. In a sermon delivered by him at Mill-hill chapel, Leeds, in 1870, he expressed his desire to bring about "better feelings between England and India—in establishing something like spiritual intercourse and fellowship between brothers and sisters in the East and brothers and sisters in the West." In the same sermon, he declared: "Sectarianism is appalling. It distresses me—it greatly distresses. There ought to be no barriers between brothers and sisters." According to him, spiritual unification of the different peoples was impossible without the enlightenment of modern science. He wanted to blend idealism and science. Calling upon his followers to make science their religion "above the Vedas, above the Bible," he pleaded in his "Epistle to Indian Brethren": "Astronomy, geology, botany and chemistry, anatomy and physiology, are the living scriptures of the god of nature, just as philosophy, logic and ethics are the scriptures of the god of the soul."

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, schisms and dis-

sensions began to appear within the Brahmo Samaj and, after the death of Keshab Chandra Sen in 1884, it entered the path of decline. Meanwhile a new dynamism was at work, a movement with a message which left a deeper impress on the nation's mind. The man who led it was Swami Vivekananda.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

AFTER the rebellion of 1857, the British rulers in India had been deliberately following a policy of encouraging discord among different communities and of inciting religious strife. It was at such a time that Shri Ramakrishna, who was a priest in an obscure Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta, came forward with the declaration that "all religions are branches of the same tree," thus expounding a philosophy which could unify the people. He explained his doctrine as follows: "I see around me men quarrelling in the name of religion. Hindus, Muslims, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishnavites, Saivites, all are engaged in these fights. They never pause to think that Lord Krishna is the same as Siva, that Brahman, Jesus and Allah are all the same, that the same Rama has a thousand names."

Ramakrishna was an illiterate commoner. Yet, his sincerity and philosophical insight drew the attention of Bengali intellectuals. Brahmo leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, eminent litterateurs and artists like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Girish Chandra Ghosh, were among his admirers. He had a large number of disciples also, and the greatest of them was young Narendra, known later as Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda was born in a middle class family in Calcutta in 1863. The modern ideas of the Brahmo Samaj, founded by Ram Mohan Roy, attracted him in his student days. While at college, young Narendra (as he was called then) came to hear of the great saint, Sri Ramakrishna. The boy went to Dakshineswar to meet him.

During the interview, Narendra asked the Paramahamsa: "Have you seen God?" It was a daring question. The saint answered: "Yes, I see God as I see you.... God can be seen. He can be realised. But who is interested in this? How much do men suffer for the sake of their wives, for their children, for wealth? How much do they weep? If one sheds innocent tears for the vision

of God, He can be realised." The reply stirred the soul of young Narendra. This happened in 1881, when he was barely seventeen.

The association with Shri Ramakrishna gave a new significance to Vivekananda's life. It gave him the self-confidence necessary to carry out the tasks he had in view. In 1886, Sri Ramakrishna passed away. Vivekananda then founded the Ramakrishna Mission to propagate the new gospel and to awaken the people to a new consciousness. Under the banner of a reformed religion, Ramakrishna's disciples entered the field of social service, too, in a big way.

Vivekananda was a brilliant intellectual, in many ways more brilliant than his master. As a student, he had attained unusual proficiency in modern sciences, in world history and philosophy. Contemporary thought and new bourgeois concepts attracted him. He became an admirer of Robespierre of the French Revolution and greeted Columbia's struggle for independence.

With his world vision, Vivekananda believed that Indian progress was linked with the progress of the whole world. He declared: "No progress is possible without the whole world going forward together. As days go by, it is becoming clearer that no solution can be found for any problem on the basis of a narrow racial or nationalist viewpoint."

For five years after Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda travelled throughout the length and breadth of the country, living on the alms offered by people. This experience enabled him to realise the unity underlying the bewildering diversity of India. He grasped the strength as well as the weaknesses of the Indian people. He saw that the vast majority of the common people were living in the depths of ignorance and superstition, their individuality repressed by the British colonialists and the upper classes of Indian society. He felt that, without solving the problem of poverty, without strengthening the people morally and intellectually and enabling them to stand on their own feet, no religion could be effective. It was in the course of his wanderings as a mendicant that Vivekananda decided that the work towards raising the living standards of the poor should be given the foremost place in his mission. In a letter written

later, he explained his position thus: "Material civilization, nay, even luxury, is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread, bread! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in Heaven. Pooh! India is to be raised the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunity for everybody!"[1]

Social, economic and political reconstruction of the country, according to him, was a prerequiste for the spiritual uplift of the masses. "They ask us for food," he once said, "but we give them stones. To offer religion to a starving people is to insult them. The teaching of religious principles to a starving man is an affront to his self-respect." To the missionaries who sought to save the souls of unbelievers, he put the question: "Why is it that you do not try to save their bodies from starvation?"

At the same time, he strongly criticised the failings and weaknesses of the people, the practice of untouchability, the feelings of caste superiority, priestcraft and religious tyranny. He declared: "I prefer to see you as confirmed atheists rather than as superstitious fools. For the atheist lives, and may be of some use. But when superstition holds sway, the brain is dead, the mind is frozen, and decadence engulfs life." Again: "It is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred millions of gods on the authority of anybody."[2] He wanted the people of India to have courage and self-confidence. "Be strong. Do not be a weakling. Be brave. Be not a coward." This was his trumpet call to the youth of India. It was a gospel of strength, of manliness, that he preached. "What our country now requires are powerful wills, steel-like muscles and firm nerves —such as cannot be stopped by anything, as can, if necessary, face death in the depths of the ocean, in the effort to achieve one's purpose." These exhortations infused a new vitality into the current of India's national life and lifted patriotism to a high spiritual level.

Liberty is the first condition of growth, said Vivekananda. But,

[1] *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, p. 862.

[2] Swami Vivekananda: *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 334.

to him, liberty certainly did not mean absence of obstacles in the way of social aggrandisement or economic exploitation. Liberty meant "our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence and wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others, and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge."[3] While expounding such progressive ideas, he criticised escapist doctrines like mysticism. "Occultism and mysticism," he said, "have very nearly destroyed us, though they may have great truths in them. We have wept long enough. We now want a man-making religion. Anything that makes you weak, reject as poison. Truth is strengthening. Give up these weakening mysticisms." In spite of his deep faith in religion, Vivekananda stood for reason. He was against superstition, revelation and inspired knowledge. "No genuine inspiration ever contradicts reason. Where it does, it is no inspiration."

To Vivekananda, religion was not barren or abstract. It was a practical matter. He exhorted the people to practise this religion "for the good of many, for the happiness of many," for the social, political and economic uplift of the masses. "The individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable. This is an eternal truth and is the bedrock on which the universe is built. To move slowly towards the infinite whole, bearing a constant feeling of intense sympathy and sameness with it, being happy with its happiness and being distressed with its affliction, is the individual's sole duty."[4]

However, Vivekananda's world outlook was essentially idealistic, although it contained elements of materialism. He believed in one Infinite Power—Brahman. But, God to him was not something supernatural, something above and beyond man. He said: "I have been asked many times: 'Why do you use that old word—God?' Because it is the best word for our purpose.... All the hopes, aspirations and happiness of humanity have been centred in that word. It is impossible now to change it. All that is great

[3] *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 561-94.

[4] Swami Vivekananda: *Modern India*, p. 45.

and holy is associated with it." Man's supreme objective was to attain identity with Brahman, through self-purification and service of the people. Man was, thus, the centre of Vivekananda's religious perspective. He, who had set out in search of God, ultimately recognised man as the centre of his world. He called upon the people to find God in man. For, beyond the world, there was no God. The universe itself was Brahman.

The universe, according to Vivekananda, was uncreated, eternal and self-manifesting. He pooh-poohed the idea of a personal God having created the world: "We have seen first of all that this cannot be proved, this idea of a personal God creating the world; is there any child that can believe this today? Because a *kumbhakara* creates *ghata*, therefore a God created the world! If this is so, then your *kumbhakara* is God also, and if anyone tells you that he acts without head and hands, you may take him to a lunatic asylum."[5] He asserted: "This universe has not been created by an extra-cosmic God, nor is it the work of any outside genius. It is self-creating, self-dissolving, self-manifesting. One infinite existence, Brahman, *Tattvamasi, Svetaketo*—'That thou art, O Svetaketu!' Thus, see that this and this alone and none else can be the only scientific religion."[6]

While Vivekananda went back to the Vedas and Upanishads to find the essential basis for his religious views, he acknowledged the values of modern civilisation. He even tried to reconcile his religious convictions with science, thus: "What is the fight between science and religion everywhere? Religions are encumbered with such a mass of explanations which come from outside—one angel is in charge of the sun, another of the moon and so on, *ad infinitum*; every change is caused by a spirit, the one common point of agreement being that they are all outside the thing, while science means that the cause of a thing is sought out by the nature of the thing itself. As, step by step, science is progressing, it has taken the explanation of natural phenomena out of the hands of spirits and angels."[7]

[5]Swami Vivekananda: *The Vedanta*, Speech at Lahore in 1897.
[6]*Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, p. 279.
[7]*Ibid*, pp. 278-79.

Vivekananda described himself as a Vedantin. The Upanishadic axioms "I am He" and "Thou art That" were sources of inspiration to him. Advaita Vedanta interested him most. He even considered that Advaita was the most scientific religion. The Advaita of Sankara, however, underwent radical changes at his hands. Sankara's Advaita was unchanging, immutable, eternal and abstract. But, to Vivekananda, Advaita was dynamic and active. "Motion or change is the song of life," he declared. The Buddha as a philosopher was the object of Sankara's denunciation, while Vivekananda adored him. Sankara confined Vedanta to the bounds of his Advaita concepts, and attacked all other schools of philosophy. Vivekananda, however, made an earnest attempt to integrate the diverse trends of Indian philosophy and thought. Sankara's Vedanta was a withdrawal into the shell of metaphysical thought, whereas Vivekananda's vision encompassed the whole world. "We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic, nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense."[8] He was not a sectarian in any sense of the term, and was not afraid or intolerant of other views. "Let sects multiply!" he said. "Whirlpools and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. It is the clash of thought that awakens thought." Vivekananda's was indeed a supreme effort to join together the springs of India's religious thought and philosophies, old and new, into a mighty stream which could wash away the impurities of the past and the failings of the present. His Vedanta was an exhortation to view humanity as the manifestation of Divinity. He wanted religion to bring the light of knowledge to the people and help the poor and the weak in their struggle for a better future. "The abstract Advaita," he said in a lecture at Harvard University, "must become living, poetic, in our everyday life; out of the hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms: and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology."

"Who cares whether there is a heaven or hell," he wrote on another occasion, "who cares if there is a soul or not, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world, and it is full

[8] *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 83.

of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourself—this is the first lesson to be learnt. Whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan, the one lesson obvious to all is the destruction of the little self and the building up of the real self."[9]

Badarayana formulated the early Vedanta Sutra during a period of Indian history when the mode of production based on the ancient Varanasrama system was beginning to develop. Sankara wrote his commentaries in the spirit of the feudal times in which he lived. Vivekananda interpreted, modified and liberalised the Vedanta to suit the new outlook of the people when modern capitalism was forging ahead, hand in hand with science and technology.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the true consequences of capitalism—not only its achievements, but its negative features and reactionary aspects—were becoming manifest. They left their impress on Vivekananda's mind, too. In 1893, he visited the United States as the Indian delegate to the World Congress of Religions. The modernism and dynamism of America fascinated him, and he hailed her as the "birthplace of freedom." He declared that the material civilisation of America and the spiritual civilisation of India should be blended. However, America had changed much by the time of his second visit. The arrogance of wealth and power irritated him this time, and he had a sense of revulsion against "the monumental ignorance" that subsisted there along with material progress. He declared openly that his previously expressed hope that, in future, people under political bondage could free themselves through the aid of the U.S.A. was only an illusion.

The greed and avarice of the imperialist countries pained Vivekananda greatly. He warned that the fumes of war were spreading, and that Europe was becoming a battle ground. The wickedness of capitalism which he saw flourishing in Europe disgusted him and he felt drawn towards the new revolutionary ideas that were in the making. He met Prince Kropotkin, the Russian revolutionary anarchist. Socialist ideas produced a great impression on

[9]Swami Vivekananda: *Practical Vedanta.*

his mind. He began to call himself a socialist. "I am a socialist," he said, "not because I think it is a perfect system, but because half a loaf is better than no bread." He did not fail to notice the inherent strength of the working class: "If the labourers stop work, your supply of food and cloth also stops. And you regard them as low class people and vaunt about your own culture! Engrossed in the struggle for existence, they did not have the opportunity for the awakening of knowledge. They have worked so long uniformly like machines guided by human intelligence, and the clever, educated sections have taken the substantial part of the fruit of their labour. In every country, this has been the case. But times have changed The lower classes are generally awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, determined to extract their legitimate dues. The upper class will no longer be able to repress the lower, however much they might try. The well-being of the higher classes now lies in helping the lower to get their legitimate rights."

Again, he wrote: "Human society is in turn governed by the four castes—the priets, the soldiers, the traders, and the labourers. Last will come the labourers' (Sudras') rule.... The first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last. They must have it. None can resist it."

From his wanderings abroad, he turned back to India. His faith in the common man increased immeasurably. The only hope for India, he said, lay in the common people, for the upper classes were exhausted, physically and morally. He urged a radical transformation of the social order because "all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge" and declared that "those social rules which stand in the way of the unfolding of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom."[10]

Vivekananda passed away in 1902 in his thirty-nineth year. During his life, there was no working class movement or organisation in India because the class itself was only just emerging. Yet, with the fervour of a great revolutionary he expressed in his last writings his sympathies for and unshakable faith in the

[10]Swami Vivekananda: *Works*, Vol. V, p. 110.

working class. He prophesied a great future for his motherland not only in freedom but in socialism. Indeed, this remarkable man raised the slogan of socialism in India about two decades before the Socialist Revolution in Russia. No wonder that he became a great source of inspiration for the new generations in the country.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SOCIAL REFORM AND RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM

THE economic and political developments in India in the first half of the nineteenth century became more and more incompatible with the outmoded religious beliefs, obsolete customs and ossified social relations. But, deeprooted religious beliefs and social customs did not readily give way to rationalism, scientific thought and the modern way of life. Under such conditions, economic and political struggles naturally put on a religious garb. The reactionary classes quoted the Vedas and Sastras not only to safeguard their vested interests and to justify social inequalities, but also to support the British Government. Progressive classes and groups, on the other hand, used the same religious texts to justify social and political changes.

Even among the advocates of change, two contradictory and often conflicting tendencies were in evidence. One section of the intelligentsia considered the revival of religious traditions as an important factor for safeguarding "national" culture from the attack of the West. They counterpoised the "spiritual" culture of India to the "materialist" culture of the West. They asserted that Indian culture was superior to the Western and denounced all foreign cultural influences. They insisted on the strict observance of many of the traditional customs, rituals and ceremonies of Hinduism, although they were opposed to some of the obsolete customs.

The second tendency was manifested by intellectuals who stood unflinchingly for a reform of the Hindu religion and society in accordance with the needs of the times. Their appeal was not to a revivalist faith in the country's past but to the spirit of eagerness to go forward to a better and greater future with the help of modern science and culture.

Explaining the difference between reformism and revivalism, Lajpat Rai observed: "The real significance of these words- 'reform' and 'revival' — if any, seems to be in the authority on

authorities from which the reformers and revivalists respectively seek their inspiration for guidance in matters social. The former are bent on relying more upon reason and the experience of European society, while the latter are disposed primarily to look at their Shastras and past history, and the traditions of their people and the institutions of the land which were in vogue when the nation was at the zenith of its glory."[1]

It is true that the revivalists endeavoured to rouse the people by harping on the lost glory of Hinduism. But, it would not be correct to say that the reformers ignored the traditions of the land. Theirs, too, was an attempt to build a new future out of the heritage of the past. In their effort to harmonise the past and the present, they, too, tried to rely on the teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas. Hinduism was in their blood, but they were not opposed to other religions. In fact, they worked for a synthesis of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and even dreamt of a universal religion. Broadly speaking, it was humanism that dominated their thinking and they longed to do away with the distinctions between man and man. In this effort, however, they wanted to assimilate the achievements of Western science and the rational outlook accompanying it. Next to Ram Mohan Roy, Mahadev Govind Ranade was the leading light of this new outlook.

Ranade and the Prarthana Samaj. Mahadev Govind Ranade occupies a prominent place in the history of social reforms in India. An eminent economist and jurist, he established, in 1870, the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay on the model of the Brahmo Samaj. The following were the cardinal principles of faith of the Samaj:

1. God is the creator of this universe.
2. His worship alone leads to happiness in this world and the next.
3. Love and reverence for Him, an exclusive faith in Him, praying and singing to Him spiritually with these feelings and doing the things pleasing to Him constitute His true worship.

[1]Lajpat Rai: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1966, p. 54.

4. To worship and pray to images and other created objects is not a true mode of divine adoration.
5. God does not incarnate Himself and there is no one book which has been directly revealed by God or is wholly infallible.
6. All men are His children; therefore, they should behave towards each other as brethren without distinction. This is pleasing to God and constitutes man's duty.[1]

Under Ranade's leadership, the Prarthana Samaj played a vital role in the movement against the caste system, child marriage, idolatry and other evils in Hindu society. In order to prove that his views were strictly in conformity with the Sastras, he wrote erudite works like the "Vedic Authorities for Widow Remarriage" and "Shastric Texts on the subject of Infant Marriage."

Criticising the revivalists, Ranade argued: "When we are asked to revive our institutions and customs, people seem to be very much at sea as to what it is they seek to revive.... Shall we revive the old habits of our people when the most sacred of our castes indulged in all the abominations, as we now understand them, of animal food and drink which exhausted every section of our country's zoology and botany? The men and gods of those old days ate and drank forbidden things to excess in a way no revivalist will now venture to recommend. Shall we revive the twelve forms of sons, or eight forms of marriage which included capture, and recognised mixed and illegitimate intercourse? Shall we revive the Niyoga system of procreating sons on our brothers' wives when widowed? Shall we revive the old liberties taken by the Rishis and by the wives of the Rishis with the marital tie? Shall we revive the hecatombs of animals sacrificed from year's end to year's end and in which human beings were not spared as propitiatory offerings? Shall we revive the Shakti worship of the left hand with its indecencies and practical debaucheries? Shall we revive the Sati and infanticide customs or the flinging of living men into the rivers, or over rocks, or hook-swinging, or the crushing beneath Jagannath car?

[1] *Prarthana Samaj Report*, 1911-12. Quoted in J.N. Farquhar: *Modern Religious Movements in India*, p. 80.

Shall we revive the internecine wars of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, or the cruel persecution and degradation of the aboriginal population? Shall we revive the custom of many husbands to one wife, or of many wives to one husband? Shall we require our Brahmins to cease to be landlords and gentlemen, and turn into beggars and dependants upon the king as in olden times? These instances will suffice to show that the plan of reviving the ancient usages and customs will not work our salvation, and is not practicable."[3]

If a revival of the past is impossible and undesirable, social reform was the only way to remove the deformities of the social order. Elucidating the inseparable relation between social reform and politics, Ranade stated: "You cannot have a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economic system, when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideas are low and grovelling, you cannot succeed in the social, economic and political spheres. This inter-dependence is not accidental but it is the law of our nature."[4]

At the same time, he emphasised that social reform did not mean a complete break with the past. "The true reformer," said he, "has not to write on a clean slate. His work is to complete the half-written sentence." He urged Hindus and Muslims to work jointly and eschew separatism and narrowmindedness. Addressing the thirteenth session of the Social Conference held at Lucknow in 1899, he warned: "If the lessons of the past have any value, one thing is clear, *viz.* that, in this vast country, no progress is possible unless both Hindus and Mohammedans join hands and are determined to follow the lead of men who flourished in Akbar's time and were his chief advisers and councillors, and sedulously avoid the mistake which were committed by his great-grandson, Aurangazeb. Joint action from a sense of common interest, and a common desire to bring about the fusion of the thoughts and feelings of men so as to tolerate small differences and bring about

[3]C.Y. Chintamani: *Indian Social Reform*, Part II, pp. 89-90.

[4]Quoted in R.K. Prabhu: *An Anthology of Modern Indian Eloquence*, p. 26.

concord—these were the chief aims kept in view by Akbar and they formed a divine faith formulated in the Din-i-ilahi. Every effort on the part of either Hindus or Mohammedans to regard their interests as separate and distinct, and every attempt made by the two communities to create separate schools and interests among themselves, and not to heal the wounds inflicted by mutual hatred of caste and creed, must be deprecated on all hands. It is to be feared that this lesson has not been sufficiently kept in mind by the leaders of both communities in their struggle for existence and in the acquisition of power and predominance during recent years."[5]

Ranade found that social reform movements were springing up in different parts of the country. He, therefore, took the initiative to establish the National Social Conference, the object of which was "to stimulate and strengthen the forces of reform by bringing together every year in mutual consultation representatives of the various associations and movements which, scattered over all India, were struggling with social evils."[6]

Ranade was of the view that the Indian National Congress founded in 1885 should associate itself with questions of social reform; but the dominant leadership of the Congress did not like the idea. Even moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, who recognised the need of social reform, argued that the Congress was not the proper platform for it. "A national Congress," he said, "must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class congresses."[7]

The annual sessions of the National Social Conference were, however, allowed to be held in the same *pandal* in which the Congress met. But, in 1895, even this concession was withdrawn at the instance of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and other extremist leaders who thought that there was no connection between political reform and social reform and threatened that the Congress would be split, if it allowed its *pandal* to be used by the Social Conference.

The leaders of the Social Conference inaugurated by Ranade

[5]C. Y. Chintamani: *Indian Social Reform*, Part II, pp. 122-23.

[6]James Kellock: *Mahadev Govind Ranade*, p. 19.

[7]Dadabhai Naoroji: *Presidential Address to the Second Session of the Congress.*

consisted mainly of enlightened upper caste Hindus and, naturally, their reforms related principally to the reorganisation of the upper layer of Hindu society. They tried to revitalise Hindu society through reforms relating to remarriage of widows, women's right to property, education of women, abolition of child marriage, inter-caste marriage, etc. It is true that they were opposed to the caste system and even agitated for the elevation of the low castes through the removal of untouchability and other disabilities associated with it. But, their activities did not affect the vast masses of people, especially the millions of untouchables and outcastes who had been condemned for centuries to a life of utter wretchedness, servitude and degradation.

But, slowly and surely, the movement for social reforms began to influence people belonging to the lower castes. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a remarkable awakening among the Ezhavas of Kerala, the Mahars of Maharashtra, the Vokkaligas of Mysore and the Namasudras of Bengal. The chief characteristic of this new awakening was that its torch-bearers were themselves untouchables.

Shri Narayana Guru: While the revivalists led by the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society were attracting the upper and middle classes with an orthodox bent of mind, progressive reform movements were gaining momentum in different parts of the country. Even regions like Kerala where castes and subcastes, untouchability and unapproachability existed in their extreme forms, could not keep aloof from the general awakening in the country. Shri Narayana Guru was the most eminent among the leaders of the reform movement in Kerala. Born in 1854 in a low caste Ezhava family in south Kerala, he acquired mastery over Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam at an early age. He was attracted powerfully towards the Advaita philosophy, but he never allowed his perspective to be dimmed by an ultraspiritual outlook. Freeing himself from the straitjacket of feudalist thinking, he boldly proclaimed: "One Caste, One Religion, and One God for all men." This resounding slogan was at once a challenge to a decadent society and a call to build up a new culture suited to modern times.

The people of Kerala worshipped innumerable gods and

goddesses. Those who belonged to the lower castes and the outcastes had their own primitive deities which were looked down upon by the higher castes. Narayana Guru discouraged the propitiation of such gods. Under the prevailing conditions, his efforts for the elimination of the parochial gods and goddesses and their replacement by one God served to unite the people.

Shri Narayana Guru, however, did not oppose idol worship as Ram Mohan Roy did in Bengal. He began with the establishment of new temples where all people could worship without caste distinctions. This was an act of rebellion against the higher castes; for, in those times, only the brahmins could found temples; and people belonging to the lower castes who were treated as untouchables and unapproachables were denied entry into them. The new temples had a good response from the low caste Hindus. Later, the Guru directed his efforts towards the setting up of a new type of temple with no idols.

The reformer's attack on the feudal setup was very effective. He opposed the caste system and encouraged modern education and culture. He also attached great importance to industrial activities. The first industrial exhibition in Kerala was held under his auspices. All these naturally roused the ire of the brahmin and nair landlords who topped at that time the social hierarchy in Kerala. Yet, Narayana Guru resolutely stuck to his path, and devoted his entire life and energy to the fight against medieval superstitions, caste tyranny and feudal exploitation of the downtrodden.

Although some educated people belonging to the upper classes also hailed his leadership, the Guru's campaign was mainly carried on by the backward communities, particularly the Ezhavas. The relatively affluent section of the Ezhava community financed his schemes including the building of temples, schools, etc. But, the broadbased reform movement launched by Shri Narayana, directed against all communalism and sectarianism, was an integral part of the upsurge that was taking place throughout India and it laid the basis for the national movement in Kerala. Although clothed in the religious garb, his teachings played a great role in the anti-feudal struggle of the people of Kerala.

Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj: The outlook of Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, was basically different from that of modernist reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade. He, too, pleaded for national unity, but his concept of national unity was based on the acceptance of Hinduism and the authority of the Vedas by all Indians. According to him, Muslims and Christians were enemies of Aryan culture and, therefore, could have no place in any scheme of national unification. In his "Satyartha Prakash," he not only denounced Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity as false religions, but violently opposed any attempt to synthesize or harmonise their outlooks with Aryan thought. He denounced the social reformers of the Prarthana Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, because "the people belonging to these Samajas are very much wanting in patriotism, have imitated the Christians in many things, have even altered the rules and regulations governing marriage and eating and drinking with others.... They eat and drink most indiscriminately, *i.e.*, they even eat and drink with Europeans, Mohammedans, outcaste people, etc."[8]

He attacked not only the teachings of prophets like Christ and Mohammed, but also the ideals of saints like Kabir, Nanak and Chaitanya who enriched the cultural heritage of the country in the Middle Ages. One of his reasons for opposing the Brahmo Samaj was that "in the sacred book of the Brahmo Samaj, the names of Christ, Moses, Mohammed, Nanak and Chaitanya are mentioned in the list of holy men but not a single name from among the sages and seers of the past. One can easily infer from this that these people hold the same beliefs as have been taught by those whose names are recorded in their sacred book as holy men."[9]

Dayananda and the Arya Samaj, founded by him in 1875, strove to rouse the patriotic feelings of the people by the revivalist slogan: "Back to the Vedas." He regarded the Vedas as derived from God and, therefore, infallible. To him, they embodied the wisdom and knowledge not only of the past, but also of the future. "In the acceptance of the Vedas, the whole truth is accepted." While

[8]Swami Dayananda Saraswati: *The Light of Truth*, Madras, 1932, pp. 432-33.

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 432.

Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade preferred reliance on reason in the event of a conflict between Vedic precepts and reason, Dayananda was firm in his conviction that the Vedas provided the final authority on any question. He explained his credo as follows:

> "I hold that the four Vedas—the repository of knowledge and religious truths—are the Word of God. They comprise what is known as the Samhita Mantra portion only. They are absolutely free from error, and are an authority unto themselves. In other words, they do not stand in need of any other book to uphold their authority. Just as the sun or a lamp, by his light, reveals his own nature as well as that of other objects of the universe, such as the earth, even so are the Vedas."[10]

Unlike Ram Mohan Roy and other modernists, Dayananda revived the yajnas and other Vedic rituals. He also wanted to revive the old Varnasrama system and the division of society into four classes. Of course, he agreed with the Apasthambha Sutras according to which " a low class man, may, by leading a virtuous life, rise to the level of a higher class man and should be ranked as such. In like manner, a high class man can, by leading a sinful life, sink down to the level of a class lower than his, and should be considered as such." But, he explained these Sutras as follows: "By the application of this law, each class, being comprised of individuals who possess all the qualifications that are necessary for admission into it, is kept in a stage of unadulterated purity, that is to say, no Kshatriya, Vaishya or Sudra is allowed to enter into or remain in the Brahmana class. Similarly, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra classes also remain unadulterated. In short, there can be no mixture of classes, hence no class will be disgraced or become the subject of reproach in the public eye".[11] He raised his voice against intercaste marriages also and preached that people should marry persons of their own caste. "It is then and then only that the people will faithfully discharge the duties of their respective classes and secure thereby perfect harmony."[12]

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 657.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

This does not mean that every activity of Dayananda Saraswati was outmoded and reactionary. Some of his views undoubtedly had a positive significance. He rejected polytheism, advocated the worship of one formless God, criticised the bigotry of the hereditary brahmin priests, opposed idolatry and child marriage and tried to raise the status of women and lower caste Hindus by spreading education among them. But, the motive behind all these activities was the strengthening and consolidation of Hinduism.

The Arya Samaj, under the leadership of Dayananda, launched a campaign for unification of the Hindus and for the conversion of the adherents of other faiths into the Hindu fold. Their rigid and dogmatic efforts for Hindu revivalism and their proselytising activities excited considerable opposition among Muslims and prevented the common people from fighting unitedly for their rights and for the common interests of the country. In the words of Nehru, the Arya Samaj "was an attempt to convert defensive and static Hinduism into an aggressive, missionary religion. It was meant to revive Hinduism. What gave the movement some strength was a colouring of nationalism. It was, indeed, Hindu nationalism raising its head. And the very fact that it was Hindu nationalism made it difficult for it to become Indian nationalism."[18]

Thus, the Arya Samaj from the beginning represented a restricted trend of national consciousness. It was as consistently anti-Islam and anti-Christian as anti-colonialist. However, for quite some time, it did succeed in rousing the people, especially the middle class, attracting a large number of patriots to its fold. Nevertheless, by defending everything Hindu and opposing all other creeds, it restricted the scope of the new awakening. It began to obstruct social and political advance by its disruptive and sectarian attitude towards real national unity and its animosity against Muslims and Christians.

The Theosophical Society: Another revivalist movement of this period was the Theosophical Society established in Madras in 1882 by Madame Blavatsky, a Russian woman who claimed to possess occult powers, and her American friend Colonel Olcott. According to Madame Blavatsky, this new society was started at

[18]J. Nehru: *Glimpses of World History*, p. 436.

the bidding of an unseen "Hierarchy of Masters," who lived somewhere in Tibet, and from whom she received secret communications through her spiritualistic powers. The Theosophical Society cleverly combined religious propaganda with occultism which attracted the gullible and gathered many enthusiastic workers around it. Madame Blavatsky used some of her own "miraculous powers" to carry conviction to the people that something other than the visible world existed. "This Indian grafting of American spiritualism," as Vivekananda remarked, "with only a few Sanskrit words taking the place of spiritualistic jargon—Mahatma missals taking the place of ghostly raps and taps and Mahatmic inspiration that of obsession by ghosts.... Indian thought, charlatanry, and mango-growing faquirism had all become identified in the minds of educated people in the West and this was all the help rendered to Hindu religion by the Theosophists."[14] D.S. Sarma, has an interesting story to narrate about this: "Some of these phenomena consisted in 'precipitating' letters, in producing material objects out of nothing and in getting messages from the Masters. While the Theosophists believed that these phenomena and these letters were genuine, others began to entertain suspicions about their origin, and so the Society for Physical Research, London, deputed one Richard Hodgson to investigate the facts and send a report. He arrived in India, collected evidence, examined witnesses and reported that the letters had all been forged by Madame Blavatsky, that she was a charlatan and a trickster, and that Olcott and the others had been simply duped. Unfortunately, at this juncture, Madame Blavatsky fell ill and had to leave India suddenly."[15]

But, she did not keep quiet. She settled down in England and continued to impart secret occult teachings to "deserving disciples"! It was in this period that the celebrated Irish woman, Mrs. Annie Besant, who had been a rationalist, a free thinker and a Fabian agitator along with Mr. and Mrs. Sydeney Webb, suddenly changed her mind and became a disciple of Madame Blavatsky. She came to India in 1863 with the aim of popularising Theosophy. Till

[14]*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, pp. 263-65.

[15]D. S. Sarma: *Hinduism Through the Ages*, p. 114.

her death in 1933, she lived in India, having adopted India as her home. Many Hindu intellectuals were attracted by her speeches and writings and joined the Theosophical Society, because, as Nehru put it, "Mrs. Annie Besant was a powerful influence in adding to the confidence of the Hindu middle classes in their spiritual and national heritage."[16]

The declared objective of the Theosophists was to form "a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour, to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science and to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man." The society claimed to represent the quintessence of all religions. But, this did not prevent its leaders from adopting Hinduism as their own religion. Mrs. Besant declared: "Among the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophical and none so spiritual as the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. The more you know it, the more you love it; the more you try to understand it, the more deeply will you value it." Again: "Make no mistake: without Hinduism, India has no future. Hinduism is the soil into which India's roots are struck, and torn out of that she will inevitably wither, as a tree torn out from its place."

"This society", as Bipin Chandra Pal observed, "told our people that instead of having any reason to be ashamed of their past or of the legacies left to them by it, they have every reason to feel justly proud of it all, because their ancient seers and saints had been the spokesmen of the highest truths and their old books, so woefully misunderstood today, had been the repositories of the highest human illumination and wisdom."[17]

The Theosophical Society accepted Hinduism *in toto*, including its outmoded rituals and customs and its doctrine of karma and rebirth. Annie Besant often used to assert that she had been a Hindu in her former birth. As late as 1911 when the anti-imperialist movement in India was gathering force, she was engaged in the

[16]J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 343.

[17]Bipin Chandra Pal: *Memories of My Life and Times in the Days of My Youth*, Calcutta, 1932, p. 424.

investigation of her past birth and rebirth. She upheld even the caste system. The Theosophical Society, like the Arya Samaj, was interested in the removal of the subdivisions within the four castes, not of the caste system itself. Lajpat Rai wrote: "Mrs. Besant and her school have already pronounced against the sub-divisions in the main castes. Her defence of the original Hindu conception of four castes principally coincides with the view of the Arya Samajists in the matter and practically knocks the present caste system on the head, though in theory only. In practice, neither the Arya Samajists nor the reformers can go further than denunciation. All of them agree that a beginning should be made with the sub-divisions."[18]

It is true that in later years she became rather critical of the caste system ; for, she stated in 1913: "I regret it, but am bound to say that I do not believe that the caste system can continue in India in the changing life of the nation and with the heavy responsibilities which more and more will fall upon her sons." But, this sudden deviation from orthodoxy had an unfavourable reaction from the ultra-orthodox theosophists. Many left the organisation, and Mrs. Besant, left alone, could not continue her religious propaganda for long. But, she continued her political activities and tried to strengthen the Home Rule movement of which she was one of the prominent leaders. This movement continued to attract the people till the beginning of the twenties, when Mahatma Gandhi started his non-cooperation movement.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many other orthodox and revivalist Hindu organisations sprang up in the different provinces. At a conference held in Delhi in 1902, these regional organisations were united into a large all-India organisation called the Bharata Dharma Mahamandala. It stood for the revival of Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion. It had the adherence of numerous ruling princes, wealthy landlords and Hindu educationists like Madan Mohan Malaviya.

The Parsees: A group of Parsees who left their native land, Iran, after that country was conquered by the Arabs, had settled down in Gujarat and Bombay as a distinct community. Living in the Hindu

[18]Lajpat Rai: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1966, p. 48.

environment, they had adopted several Hindu customs like polygamy, child marriage, festivals and modes of worship. The Parsee priesthood had become a hereditary caste.

In the wake of the social reform movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade, there was an awakening among the Parsees also. In 1851, under the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji, Wacha and others, the Rahnumai Mazdayasman Sabha or the Religious Reforms Association came into being. The declared object of the Association was "the regeneration of the social condition of the Parsees and the restoration of the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity." The reformers started schools for modern English education and, within a comparatively short space of time, they achieved considerable progress. But, when they began to advocate the removal of certain elements of their traditional system as superstitions, revivalism raised its head with the cry "Everything Zoroastrian is good; everything Western is bad. We must defend ourselves against the pestilential materialism of Europe." Falling under the influence of the Theosophical society, they began to defend the most superstitious observances of their religion and called upon the people to come forward for "the full defence of the whole religion." And they encouraged all sorts of superstition: "They preach to the less educated classes of people that there is high efficiency in offering flowers and milk and coconuts to the waters; they preach to the people as an act of special religious merit to fall prostrate before and kiss imaginary pictures of their prophet; they exhort people to make a show of penitence by a vigorous slapping of cheeks. They represent to the people that the sole efficacy of their prayers consists in the material form resultant upon the physical vibrations created by their utterances."[19]

[19] *Journal of the Iranian Association*, March 1913, p. 247. Quoted by J. N. Friquhar.

"Our God is also Man. If this is condemned as anthropomorphism, then man should be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his beloved as a person and not as a principle of psychology."[7]

Tagore strove for the perfection of Man, for the development of human personality. God was the "infinite ideal of perfection," and man "the eternal process of the realisation of that ideal."[8] According to him, the Infinite manifests itself in man through this development. He says: "In knowledge, love and activity, my development will reveal the Infinite. In this is my fulfilment. The veil of imperfection will fall away from our minds, will and action, so that we shall even prove our kinship with the Infinite; this is the religion of Man." He adds that "man's utmost misfortune, therefore, is when he cannot express the greatness that is inherent in his life, when the obstacles prove too strong for him."

But, this had nothing to do with narrow and selfish individualism. He realised that the longing for perfection in man had two sides—the individual and the social. Personal perfection was inalienably connected with social perfection. "Personal achievement," he observed, "can never be absolute. The powers of those who have attained the highest positions among men are manifested through the powers of all; they are not distinct. Where man is separate as an individual, where mutual cooperation is not intimate, there indeed is barbarism."[9]

The mysticism and idealism of Tagore, again, did not make him an advocate of the path of renunciation and subjective isolation of the kind indicated by many of the great idealist philosophers of India. He was so concerned with the social and political realities of his times that he could not point out such a path. He wrote: "I have no desire for immediate emancipation from this beautiful world. I have greater interest in living among and along with men who are my brethren, in this world blessed with the sky, the horizon and the sea."

Nature with its form, colour and fragrance, man with his intellect and mind, his love and attachment, enchanted him. He

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 214.
[8] Tagore: *Creative Unity*, p. 15.
[9] Tagore: *Letters from Russia*, p. 146.

affirmed: "I do not despise these bonds, they are not tying me, they are helping me to free my mind and spreading me out from the bondage of my own self."

The central idea of his philosophy is expressed in the following poem:

"Deliverance is not for me in renunciation:
I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight:
Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine
Of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim:
My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame,
And place them before the altar of thy temple.
No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of
Sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.
Yes, all my illusions will turn into illumination of joy,
And all my desires ripen into fruits of love."

Tagore was a prolific writer. More than fifty anthologies of stories, over a hundred short stories, twelve novels, more than thirty plays, two hundred essays and two thousand poems—these were his contribution to the treasury of Indian literature and culture.

Rabindranath's thought, clothed in idealism, was neither abstract nor purposeless. His plays, novels and stories convey the passion of a patriot and reformer against the blind dogmas and superstitions of a past age and against the tyranny and injustices of the foreign rule. He ridiculed the ostentatious prayers and devotion of those who despised the poor and the lowly. One need not go to a temple or a church to see God, he said, because He is there where the peasant is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and His garment is covered with dust. "Put off the holy mantle, and even like Him come down on the dusty soil."[10]

The poetic form adopted by Tagore was similar to that of the Vaishnava poets. The influence of Kabir and other poets of the

[10] *Gitanjali*.

Bhakti Age is marked in his works. Many of the ideas and images presented by him undoubtedly bear the impress of idealism and mysticism. But, even there, the content is patriotic and humanistic.

While believing in a Supreme Power, Tagore did not despise science. He said. "In a country where there is continuous research in science, knowledge of it in fragments spreads constantly, and as a consequence one's heart is fertilised with scientific spirit." But, he believed that the Infinite or Supreme Personality was beyond the reach of science. "Our scientific world is our world of reasoning. It has its greatness and uses and attractions. We are ready to pay the homage due to it. But when it claims to have discovered the real world for us and laughs at the worlds of simple-minded men, then we must say, it is like a general grown intoxicated with his power, usurping the throne of his king, for the reality of the world belongs to the personality of man and not to reasoning. Due to the power of science, the world has come closer, there being little geographical barrier. Different nations have come closer together. But what about the inner bond of unity? Due to external facilities, men and races are coming closer, but that is congregation; they are not being united by any inner bond."

The Supreme Power, according to him, never interfered with the normal activities of Nature and with human relationships. A discussion between Gandhi and Tagore throws interesting light on this subject. In 1934, there was a terrific earthquake in Bihar. Thousands died and properties worth crores of rupees were destroyed. Gandhi ascribed this calamity to the wrath of God at the crimes and injustices perpetrated by the caste Hindus on the poor Harijans. The poet replied that an earthquake was only a natural phenomenon and that God had no hand in it. Why, he asked, did God inflict such miseries on the innocent, if punishment of the guilty was the purpose, and how could a God who punished innocent men be a God at all? Gandhi did not give in. He asserted that nothing happened without the knowledge of God, not even the trembling of a leaf. The actions of God, he said, could not be reasoned out or explained on the basis of logic. This discussion reveals the differences in the philosophical outlooks of these great men.

Tagore's patriotism was not narrow nationalism. The lofty ideals of peace and freedom and of universal brotherhood permeate all his writings. "Each nation," he wrote, "has arrived at its goal by a different path which has given a special significance to its civilization, but the fruits of it are offered to all.... There are, of course, natural differences in human races which should be respected and preserved, but our education should be such as to make us realize our unity in spite of them and discover truth through the wilderness of contradictions."

Unlike the neo-Hindu revivalists, Tagore opened his mind to the inflow of all cultural values from wherever they came. He was not opposed to foreign culture as such. "Let me say clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of such extraneous forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellecual nature.... European culture has come to us, not only with its knowledge, but with its velocity." As Jawarharlal Nehru has pointed out, "more than any other Indian, he [Tagore] has helped to bring into harmony the ideals of the East and the West, and broadened the basis of Indian nationalism. He has been India's internationalist *per excellence*, believing in and looking for international cooperation, taking India's message to other countries, and bringing their messages to his own people."[11]

At the same time, Tagore did not fall for the tinsel attractions of exotic modes of living. On his eightieth birthday in 1941, he said, with a note of anguish: "Lost in the glamorous aspects of British culture, I had never thought that out of it could come so cruel a distortion of long-cherished values; that distortion, I know at last, was the emblem of a civilized nation's contempt and callousness towards our vast masses."[12]

In the same essay, he recollected what he had witnessed in Moscow: "the tireless energy with which the Russians have tried to wipe out from their country disease and illiteracy, ignorance, penury and every outward mark of shame. Free from racial prejudice, the Soviets have projected all over their domain the power of human

[11]J. Nehru: *Discovery of India.*

[12]Tagore: *Towards Universal Man*, p. 355.

fellowship. The swift and surprising progress they have attained makes me at once happy and jealous."

He saw that colonialism was the greatest obstacle to the development of the human personality everywhere. That is why he longed for the freedom of every country. His stirring "Ode to Africa," written in 1937, reveals his sympathy for the oppressed people of that continent:

"The savage greed of the civilized
Stripped naked its unashamed inhumanity;
You wept, and your cry was somthered,
Your forest trails became muddy with tears and blood,
While the nailed boots of the robbers
Left their indelible prints
Along the history of your indignity....
....Today when on the western horizon
The sunset sky is stifled with the dust-storm,
When the beast, creeping out of its dark den,
Proclaims the death of the day with ghastly howls,
Come, you poet of the fatal hour,
Stand at that ravished woman's door,
Ask for her forgiveness,
And let that be the last great word
In the midst of the delirium of a diseased continent."

Rabindranath did not confine himself to singing of the greatness of the past and mourning over the disgrace of the present. His vision scanned the horizons of the future. In his celebrated "Gitanjali," he gives us a glimpse of the India of his dreams:

"Where the mind is without fear,
And the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
Into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where the clear stream of reason
Has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward
By thee into the ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom,
My father,
Let my country awake."

In 1930, he told his countrymen: "The fetters with which they have bound our country have to be broken by repeated attacks. Each struggle is an agony, but there is no other means of delivering ourselves from bondage." With the same passion, he wrote in 1941: "All that the so-called civilized rule has given us is 'law and order' and the instruments of a police state. The spirit of liberty has yielded to the display of barefaced might. The withholding of the most precious elements in human relationships has altogether blocked the path of our progress."[18]

But, he never committed "the sin of losing faith in Man," for, in the same essay, he prophesied: "The turning of the wheel of fortune will compel the British one day to give up their Indian Empire."

The great poet and patriot did not live to see his prophecy come true; he passed away six years before India became free.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 357.

IQBAL

IQBAL was another poet-philosopher who left his impress on modern Indian thought. Born in 1873 at Sialkot in the Punjab and educated at Lahore, Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal became a professor of philosophy towards the end of the nineteenth century when the country was astir with the ideas of revolution. Iqbal wrote a number of patriotic poems exhorting the people to fight against foreign rule, and appealing to Hindus and Muslims to unite. In 1905, he went to Europe to continue his studies. There, he acquainted himself more fully with European systems of philosophy, while paying special attention to the philosophy and culture of Islam. He returned to India in 1908 and carried on his creative activities till his death in 1938.

The philosophy of Mohammad Iqbal had much in common with that of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore was attracted by the idealism of the Upanishads; Iqbal drank deep of the Quran. Tagore was influenced by Vaishnava poets like Chaitanya and Kabir; Iqbal was indebted to poets like Rumi and Ghalib. Neither Tagore nor Iqbal thought of a return to the past. Both looked to the future and interpreted the idealist teachings of the past in terms of the needs of the first decades of the twentieth century.

Like Tagore, Iqbal believed that the development of the human personality was the highest aim of life. In his view, there was no contradiction between the individual and society. Indeed, both developed as a harmonious whole.

Iqbal criticised the Sufis who regarded "absorption in a universal life or soul as the final aim and salvation of man." According to him, those who strove for the development of personality were not abosrbed in God; they absorbed God into themselves, they did not surrender their will to God, but absorbed God's will into their own. He was opposed to all forms of mystical passivity, quiet resignation, withdrawal from mundane activities and a negative attitude to life. The mystical poets, he said, "have des-

troyed the capacity for action." Capacity for action depended on the conviction that selfhood or personality was real and not an illusion. He glorified action as life and condemned inaction as death.

"The pith of Life is contained in action
To delight in creation is the law of Life.
Arise and create a new world!
Wrap thyself in flames, be an Abraham!
To comply with this world which does not favour thy purposes
Is to fling away thy buckler on the field of battle.
The man of strong character who is master of himself
Will find Fortune complaisant.
If the world does not comply with his humour
He will try the hazard of war with Heaven
He will dig up the foundations of the universe
And cast its atoms into a new mould....
By his own strength he will produce
A new world which will do his pleasure."

What then was life? "Life," Iqbal observed, "is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all obstructions in its march by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideals.... The ego attains to freedom by the removal of all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determinate, and reaches full freedom by approaching the individual who is most free—God."[1]

He argued that only by self-affirmation and development of personality could man become strong and free: "The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation, but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique."[2]

Every object had an individuality of its own. Individuality in man was the most highly developed and became his personality. The core of the individual was known as the Ego (Khudi) "in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre." This did not, however, mean that the personality of man developed in

[1]Iqbal: *The Secrets of the Self*, lines 1019-30, 1033.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. XVIII.

isolation. It developed in society, not in the meditator's cave: "For the individual to be bound in society is a blessing; it is in community that his worth is perfected." In other words, it grew with the rest of the universe. "It is the lot of man," he wrote, "to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around his own destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own ends and purposes. And in this process of progressive change, God becomes a co-worker with him, provided man takes the initiative. Verily God will not change the condition of men, till they change what is in themselves."[3]

It is true that the individual ego or human personality was the centre of Iqbal's philosophy. But, if the ego influenced and changed the environment, the environment also acted on the ego, in its turn. It is through this action and counteraction that human personality blossomed.

According to Iqbal, the universe was not the "temporal working out of a preconditioned plan," but "a free, creative movement." Like the ego, the universe was in a state of constant flux and change, in a state of continuous activity and movement; ever creative, ever expanding. And, in this, neither inactivity nor passivity had a place.

But, this scientific analysis of nature and the universe was clothed in an unscientific, idealist garb; for, Iqbal's concept of the universe was intimately connected with that of the Ultimate Ego who "holds the finite egos in His own Self without obliterating their existence." He conceived the Ultimate Ego as a Perfect Personality with attributes of creativeness, omniscience, etc. Explaining the relation between the Ultimate Ego and the individual ego, he wrote as follows:

> "Can the finite ego, as such, retain its finitude besides the Infinite Ego? This difficulty is based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the infinite. True infiinity does not mean infinite extension which cannot be conceived without embracing

[3]Iqbal: *The Secrets of Life, Six Lectures*, p. 16.

all available finite extensions. Its nature consists in intensity and not extensity; and the moment we fix our gaze on intensity, we begin to see that the finite ego must be distinct, though not isolated, from the Infinite. Extensively regarded, I am absorbed by the spatio-temporal order as a confronting 'other' wholly alien to me. I am distinct from and yet intimately related to that on which I depend for my life and sustenance."

Not only the Ultimate Ego and religion, but art also was viewed by him from the standpoint of personality, as we see from the following:

"The ultimate end of all human activity is life—glorious, powerful, exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose, and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-yielding capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to Reality around, on the mastery of which alone Life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of Art for the sake of Art is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power."

According to Iqbal, human personality developed through a constant struggle with the environment and through individual efforts to fortify personality. By this process, the ego attained more and more freedom and approached God, the most free individual—the ideal of complete freedom. Iqbal suggested that love, indifference to rewards (faqr), courage, tolerance, living on lawful earnings and taking part in creative activities were the factors that helped man to fortify his personality. Of these, love was the most important, because it was the regenerating spirit of the universe. In his view, there was no contradiction between the fortification of human personality and the development of society. Again, it was by love that human personality found its finest fulfilment. "When the self is made strong by Love, its power rules the whole world," sang Iqbal. In a letter to Prof. Nicholson, he wrote: "This word is

used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavour to realise them. Love individualises the lover as well as the beloved. The effort to realise the most unique individuality individualises the seeker and implies individuality of the sought, for nothing else would satisfy the nature of the seeker."

Iqbal maintained that human personality could be strengthened only through ceaseless creative activity. The true significance of life, he said, consisted in a constant endeavour to remove all obstacles in the path of perfection, *i.e.*, in a ceaseless struggle with evil. Evil in any form had to be fought. The evils of colonialism, exploitation of peasants by landlords and of workers by capitalists, oppression of the weak by the strong, were all denounced by Iqbal.

He wrote:

"The capitalist from the blood of workers' veins
makes himself a clear ruby.
Landlord's oppression despoils the villagers' fields:
Revolution!"

Imperialism and narrow nationalism, he pointed out, "rob us of paradise," destroy the feelings of brotherhood and sow the seeds of war. That was why he passionately exhorted the youth to fight for the freedom of their country:

"The freeman's veins are firm as veins of granite;
The bondman's weak as tendrils of the vine."

Again, in another poem:

"If thou would'st drink clear wine from thine own grapes
Thou must needs wield authority over thine own earth!"

Iqbal was a devout Muslim; but he was not blind to the unprecedented material and cultural advancement of the West, and so he appealed to Muslims to take note of the changes. He wrote: "During all the centuries of our intellectual stupor, Europe has been seriously thinking on the great problems in which the philosophers and scientists of Islam were so keenly interested. Since the Middle

Ages, when the schools of Muslim theology were completed, infinite advance has taken place in the domain of human thought and experience. The extension of man's power over nature has given him a new faith and a fresh sense of superiority over the forces that constitute his environment. New points of view have been suggested, old problems have been restated in the light of fresh experience, and new problems have arisen. It seems as if the intellect of man is outgrowing its own most fundamental categories—time, space and causality. With the advance of scientific thought, even our concept of intelligibility is undergoing a change."

But, Iqbal considered that religion was the real remedy. And, by religion he meant Islam. He wrote: "Asia cannot comprehend modern western Capitalism with its undisciplined individualism. The faith which you represent [*i.e.* Islam] recognizes the worth of the individual, and disciplines him to give away his all to the service of God and man. Its possibilities are not yet exhausted. It can still create a new world where the social rank of man is not determined by his caste or colour, or the amount of dividend he earns, but by the kind of life he lives; where the poor tax the rich, where human society is founded not on the equality of stomachs but on the equality of spirits, where an untouchable can marry the daughter of a king, where private ownership is a trust, and where capital cannot be allowed to accumulate so as to dominate the real producer of wealth. This superb idealism of your faith, however, needs emancipation from the medieval fancies of theologians and legists."[4]

By the end of the twenties, a streak of pessimism began to darken his outlook. In 1930, he observed that every attempt to discover a principle of internal harmony and cooperation between the different religious communities in India had failed. When the struggle for freedom intensified and Mahatma Gandhi started his civil disobedience movement in 1932, Iqbal saw in it "germs of atheistic materialism." "That which really matters," he declared, "is a man's faith, his culture, his historical traditions. These are things which in my eyes are worth living for and dying for, and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be tempora-

[4]Wm. Theodore de Bary and others: *The Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 762.

rily associated." He began to argue that Hindus and Muslims were different not only in religious beliefs, not only culturally, but even racially and biologically. And, in 1937, he went to the extent of saying that "the only way to a peaceful India is a redistribution of the country on the lines of racial, religious and linguistic affinities."

Thus, the poet, who had once stirred his countrymen by his patriotic songs, turned against the freedom struggle. The philosopher who wanted to absorb God in himself and develop his personality to perfection by becoming a part of the universe ended up as a discoverer of biological differences between the Hindu and the Muslim ! The progressive reformer who upheld the scientific outlook and fought against religious superstitions himself succumbed to communalism and became the prophet of separatism in the subcontinent. As it happened, Mohammad Iqbal provided the inspiration for the two-nation theory of Mohamed Ali Jinnah, which finally led to the partition of India and the founding of the state of Pakistan amidst unprecedented disorder and bloodshed in the Punjab and several other areas.

However, Iqbal's contribution to Indian thought and literature and the progressive role he played in rousing the patriotic consciousness of the people in general, and of the Muslims in particular, cannot be overlooked in any objective study of his life and work.

CHAPTER FORTY

MAHATMA GANDHI

THE end of the First World War saw a new stage in the national liberation movement in India. The crisis of the colonial system engendered by the global conflict, the collapse of the prestige of British imperialism, the great Socialist Revolution in Russia, the atrocities of the British rulers which climaxed in the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, the widespread economic distress of the masses—all these brought about a new political atmosphere. It was at this critical juncture that Gandhism emerged as the ideology of the anti-imperialist struggle led by the national bourgeoisie.

Born in 1869 as the youngest son of Karamchand Gandhi, who had been the prime minister of a princely state in Gujarat, Mohandas Gandhi went to England in his teens for higher education. After qualifying as a barrister, he went to South Africa as the legal representative of a business firm. The misery of the immigrant Indians under the racist white Government in South Africa moved him deeply, and he was soon drawn into political activity. His sincerity and courage, and the way he organised and led the Indian settlers in their heroic fight against discrimination, for about two decades, made him famous beyond the confines of South Africa. On his return to India in 1915, he was hailed as one of the most popular leaders, and after the death of Tilak in 1920, the leadership of the national movement passed into his hands.

Mahatma Gandhi, as he was called by the people of India, was, more than any other national leader, conscious of the strength and vitality of the masses and their role in making history. Through his intimate contact with them, he had acquired an amazing capacity to feel their pulse and respond to their emotions. His experience in South Africa and his experiments with Satyagraha (Passive Resistance) had given him an insight into the power of an awakened people. He was well acquainted with the living conditions of the common man in India—his economic backwardness, political immaturity, religious outlook and social prejudices. Gandhi

formulated his line of action in such a way as to appeal to the widest sections of the people, especially the backward classes, who were impelled to join the anti-imperialist struggles led by him.

Gandhi had his own standards of political judgment and, in dealing with men and events, he held on to his own pet beliefs in spite of all opposition. His views were, however, conditioned not only by subjective factors, but also by the socio-economic reality of the period when the capitalist class and capitalist relations of production were developing in Indian society to a far greater extent than during the days of Ram Mohan Roy or Dadabhai Naoroji. And, with all their limitations, Gandhi's ideas were perfectly suited to a backward people who, on the one hand, readily responded to a religious approach, and, on the other, aspired to attune themselves to the fast-changing world.

While waging the war of liberation, Gandhi actively worked for the uplift of the masses. The constructive programme was an important part of the Gandhian movement. Khadi and other village industries, communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, adult education, village sanitation and propagation of Hindi were some of the main items of the programme. Every Satyagrahi was expected to work hard for its fulfilment ; for, according to him, "just as military training is necessary for armed revolt, training in constructive effort is necessary for civil resistance." His economic programme, which included popularisation of domestic handicrafts, the use of charkha (spinning wheel) and khadi, was based on primitive methods of production and low productivity of labour. But, it attracted the masses in the circumstances when, as a result of colonialist policy, unemployment was increasing to an enormous extent. Gandhi said, in 1921 : "India is dying of hunger as she is deprived of employment which can give her food.... The spinning wheel is a means of existence for the millions who are dying. Hunger is pushing India towards the spinning wheel."

Gandhi was intensely religoius from childhood. The ethical ideals of Islam, Christianity and Jainism had deeply influenced him, but his outlook was moulded mainly by the Hindu religion. Sometimes, he called himself an orthodox Hindu (Sanatana Hindu).

He explained his creed as follows: "I call myself as Sanatana Hindu, because: (1) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures and, therefore, in avataras and rebirth; (2) I believe in the Varnashrama Dharma in a sense, in my opinion, strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense; (3) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular; and (4) I do not disbelieve in idol worship."[1]

Replying to the statement made by Dr. Ambedkar in 1933 that "the outcaste is a by-product of the caste system; there will be outcastes as long as there are castes" and that "nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system," Gandhi wrote: "It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or a crop because of the weeds. The outcasteness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-lowness.' "

Gandhi was opposed not only to the abolition of caste and religious differences, but even to interdining and intermarrying. He confessed: "I claim that I am living on terms of friendliness with the whole world, I have never quarrelled with a single Mohammadan or Christian, but for years I have taken nothing but fruit in Mohammadan or Christian household."[2] Justifying this behaviour, he wrote: "In my opinion the idea that interdining and intermarrying is necessary for national growth is a superstition borrowed from the West. Eating is a process just as vital as the other sanitary necessities of life. And if mankind had not, much to its harm, made of eating a fetish and an indulgence, we would have performed the operation of eating in private even as one performs the other necessary functions of life in private. Indeed

[1] M.K. Gandhi: *Young India*, October 6, 1921.

[2] M.K. Gandhi: *Communal Unity*, p. 7.

the highest culture in Hinduism regards eating in that light and there are thousands of Hindus still living who will not eat their food in the presence of anybody."[8]

These professions of faith revealed the traditional, medieval Hinduism that partly influenced his outlook. Yet, his understanding of Hinduism was different from the reactionary views propagated by the conservative Hindus representing the feudal order. His Hinduism was not a stagnant religion but a dynamic one. Even the scriptures had no eternal sanctity, as he himself explained: "The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Smrithis, the Puranas and the Ithihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths, but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the slough of despond." From this standpoint, he criticised and opposed every form of religious intolerance and fanaticism. He challenged the authority of the self-appointed defenders of Hinduism, the orthodox reactionary pundits, who went about justifying all kinds of religious bigotry, superstition and outmoded practices.

The British imperialists, in their anxiety to uphold and foster everything that perpetuated backwardness, gave their support to these conservative and reactionary elements. Against this, Gandhi's activities of social reform and his crusade against medieval practices helped the forces of democracy and liberalism. His determined fight against untouchability and other evils was, in fact, part of his efforts to free India from bondage. It is true that by attacking untouchability he only wanted to purify the caste system and to revive the true Varnasrama. "The moment untouchability goes," he wrote, "the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnashrama, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other."[4]

But, objectively, the attack on untouchability, and the "Harijan movement" he initiated did not lead to a revival of Varnasrama but to a weakening of the foundations of feudalism. His message rapidly spread to every nook and corner of the country, and brought a new confidence to the millions living in ignorance and misery. It lit the fire of patriotism and roused the masses to revolt against injustice and oppression.

With regard to the fundamental question of philosophy, Gandhi took the position of objective idealism. The world, according to him, was real and existed objectively, independently of the consciousness of man, but everything originated from and depended on a spiritual principle which was primary. He had unshakable faith in God, in a mysterious, indefinable power which at once pervaded everything and transcended the senses. "I do dimly perceive," he said, "that while everything around me is changing, ever dying, there is underlying all this change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates."

Gandhi believed that a sceptic's life lacked a positive moral content. But, how could one believe in a Divinity which permeated everything and which was incarnate in every man, in the face of the butchery committed in the name of war and in the face of the misery caused by pestilence and famine? Gandhi's answer was simple: "Because these acts of terror and murder offend the conscience of man; because man knows that they represent evil; because, in the inner depths of his heart and of his mind, he deplores them. And because, moreover, when he does not go astray, misled by false teachings or corrupted by false leaders, man has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of Divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind."

In other words, the immutable, indefinable power called God was the moral law that governed all life and expressed an orderliness in the universe. Gandhi was specially attracted to the Upanishadic

[4]M.K. Gandhi: *Varnashrama Dharma*, Navajeewan Trust, 1962, p. 40.

passage: "*Isavasyam idam sarvam, yat kincha jagatyam jagat*," which means : "All that exists is pervaded by God." This idea, however, did not lead him to isolation from social reality; to him, it meant identification of one with the whole mankind. He expressed the view that God could not be found anywhere apart from humanity: "The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it."[5]

Moksha or redemption was certainly the goal of life, but the way was not shunning the world. A worldly life, given not to pleasures but to purposeful social and political activities, was, according to him, the higest form of renunciation : "My service to my people is part of the discipline to which I subject myself in order to free my soul from the bonds of the flesh. For me the road to salvation lies through love of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives."[6]

With this conviction, it was easy for him to reduce the idea of God to moral principles governing the relationship between individual and society. "To me God is truth and love," he said, "God is ethics and morality, God is fearlessness, God is the source of light and life, and all the same He is higher than and beyond all these. He is even the atheism of the atheists."[7]

The concept of God as Truth gradually gave way to the concept of Truth as God. He wrote: "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth." But, this view of Truth was not based on objective reality. It was subjective, abstract, irrational. To Gandhi, "what a pure heart feels at a particular time is Truth; by remaining firm on that, undiluted Truth can be attained."[8]

From this subjective standpoint, it was easy for him to translate Truth into love and then interpret love as non-violence. Love of man was the only means to realise Truth. "When you want to find Truth as God," he remarked, "the only inevitable means is love, that is, non-violence. And since I believe that ultimately means

[5]M.K. Gandhi: *Harijan*, August 29, 1936.
[6]*Young India*, April 4, 1920.
[7]*Young India*, March 3, 1925.
[8]*Harijan*, November 27.

and ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love."[9]

He considered non-violence or ahimsa as the highest form of ethics, for, "a perfect vision of truth can only follow a complete realization of ahimsa." He wrote: "For me ahimsa comes before Swaraj.... Ahimsa must be placed before everything else while it is professed. Then alone it becomes irresistible."

Non-violence, however, was not a negative principle. It was non-violent resistance to evil, and, therefore, it did not arise from cowardice or passivity. Only the active and the courageous could become really non-violent. "Non-violence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. Before he can understand non-violence he has to be taught to stand his ground, and even suffer death in the attempt to defend himself against the aggressor who bids fair to overwhelm him. To do otherwise would be to confirm his cowardice and take him farther away from non-violence. Whilst I may not actually help anyone to retaliate, I must not let a coward seek shelter behind non-violence so-called."[10] Again: "Non-violence does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer. It means pitting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire."

Satyagraha was the technique of non-violent resistance to evil. "It is a fundamental principle of Satyagraha," he observed, "that the tyrant whom the satyagrahi seeks to resist has power over his body and his material possessions, but he cannot have any power over his soul. The soul can remain unconquered and unconquerable even when the body is imprisoned. The whole science of Satyagraha was born from a knowledge of this fundamental truth."[11]

Non-violent resistance to evil involved suffering. Gandhi gave a religious and moral significance to suffering: "Things of fundamental importance to a people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased by their suffering."

[9]Tendulkar: *The Mahatma*, Vol. II, p. 312.

[10]*Young India*, August 11, 1920.

[11]*Young India*, May 21, 1931.

The principles of truth, non-violence and love were religious categories intimately connected with ethics and morality. They were, to Gandhi, the guidelines for self-purification and attainment of moral perfection. This is why he insisted on certain essential virtues in every Satyagrahi. Truth, non-violence, abstinence, non-stealing, non-possessiveness, simple living and faith in God were some of the moral injunctions he prescribed. Gandhi had no scientific view of the inner contradictions of the social reality and its own law of development. He believed that society could be changed according to one's own aspirations through the moral purification and the spiritual uplift of individuals, without altering the relations of production and the system of class exploitation. He considered that his ideals of morality applied to all peoples and to all conditions of society. As a panacea for social evils and as a way out of the class contradictions, this was highly impracticable. Yet, these principles had an immediate impact on social developments in India, because they were linked with the activities for social reform and the struggle for freedom. The emphasis on moral and ethical values roused thousands of young men and women to great acts of self-sacrifice, inspiring them with the beauty of simple and purposeful living, and it undoubtedly helped to inculcate a powerful nationwide discipline in the ranks of the freedom-fighters. In fact, the principle of non-violence became for Gandhi the most effective weapon in the struggle against imperialism. Armed with this, hundreds of thousands of men and women cheerfully courted arrest, baton-charges and bullets in the mass resistance to British rule.

Non-violence, however, implied not only peaceful defiance but also readiness to compromise with the opponent and the existing social relations. He recognised only slow and gradual reform on the basis of mutual agreement. Class contradictions and class struggles maturing in capitalist society did not appeal to him. He was against all revolutionary and militant activity.

Gandhi tried to establish an identity of interests between religion and politics. He considered religion as a force which could safeguard the real interests of the masses. Religion unconnected with daily life was useless to him, however, and politics bereft of religion

could not achieve real success either. That is why he endeavoured to introduce religion into the realm of politics. The theory of Satyagraha and Non-violence, he admitted, "was an attempt to introduce the religious spirit in politics." He said that "those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means." It was indeed as a religious and moral duty that he took part in politics.

Gandhi's absolute religio-ethical principles were intended for the moral and spiritual purification of the individual; but, actually, they had a greater impact on the social awakening in India. What Engels pointed out about historically determining factors conditioning all ideologies is fully applicable to the Gandhian ideology:

> "Our ideologist may turn and twist as he likes, but the historical reality which he cast out at the door comes in again at the windows, and while he thinks he is framing a doctrine of morals and law for all times and for all worlds, he is in fact only fashioning an image of the conservative or revolutionary tendencies of his day."[12]

It is true that Gandhi called himself an orthodox Hindu. But, as pointed out earlier, his Hinduism was neither narrow nor bigoted. Throughout his life, he worked earnestly for Hindu-Muslim unity. He was very much pained to see that, in spite of his efforts, the poison of communalism was spreading in the country. He, therefore, dedicated his last days to the single objective of fighting against the virus of communal hatred and fostering unity among the people professing different religions. Referring to the Hindu communalists, he wrote: "There is one section in this country today in our midst which holds that the Hindus and Muslims cannot co-exist, that either the Muslims should get out of Hindustan or they should live here as vassals of the Hindus. And similarly in Pakistan only the Muslims should remain. It is a poisonous doctrine and in it lies the root of Pakistan." And he added: "I have pledged myself to resist this doctrine and this ideology and to go or die in the attempt." And he did die in the attempt. He was murdered by a fanatic Hindu communalist on 30 January 1948.

[12]Engels: *Anti Duhring*, p. 135.

Gandhism with its stress on simplicity and religio-ethical theories emerged at a time when the masses had begun to participate in political activity in India, and when the anti-imperialist movement had reached a new stage after the First World War. The national bourgeois leadership of the Congress used Gandhism to further their own interests; in the struggle against imperialism, they sought to win concessions on the one hand and to restrict the mass movement and keep it strictly within their control on the other.

Gandhi emerged as the leader when the aftermath of the war was causing untold economic distress in India. There was an outbrust of intense anti-imperialist feeling throughout the country. Fully realising the temper of the people, Gandhi formulated a plan of national action designed to mobilise every section of the population —capitalists and workers, peasants and office employees, women, students and lawyers. His dynamic leadership gave the national struggle the broad character of a genuine mass movement. Satyagraha, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, no-tax campaigns, demonstrations, boycott—these were some of the powerful weapons he employed in the struggle against imperialism. His call to the peasants to withhold payment of taxes was a radical move, which constituted a challenge to the Government on the economic plane. He exhorted students to boycott schools and colleges which were intended to turn out civil servants to man the administrative machinery. Lawyers were asked to boycott courts and, thus, paralyse the mechanism of British justice. Young men and women rallied in thousands to participate in the campaign of "illegal" production of salt and of the boycott of liquor shops and foreign cloth. The people as a whole were urged to disobey the "lawless laws" imposed by the "satanic Government." Of course, many moderates, liberals and loyalists were shocked at these developments and some of them supported the Government. But, the Indian people generally supported the struggle for independence and a large number of them defied the organised fury of the imperialists.

But, at the height of the anti-imperialist movement of 1919-22, which, in the words of Chirol, "assumed the undeniable character of an organised revolt against the British Raj,"[13] Mahatma Gandhi

[13]Chirol: *Indian Crisis.*

suddenly called it off. The Congress Working Committee, at its meeting at Bardoli on 12 February 1922, approved the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement in view of the "inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura," a little village in the United Provinces where the people in their anger had burnt down a small police station, causing the death of some policemen. This was a gesture characteristic of the Ghandhian approach, but it annoyed the youthful revolutionaries. As Subhas Chandra Bose wrote later, "to sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling point, was nothing short of a national calamity."

Gandhi believed himself in favour of economic equality and wanted to bridge the widening gulf between the rich and the poor. He wrote: "Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved, naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists."[14] He even declared that he was trying his best to live up to the ideal of Communism: "What does Communism mean? In the last analysis, it means classless society—an ideal that is worth striving for. Only I part company with it, when force is called to aid for achieving it. We are all born equal, but we have all these centuries resisted the will of God. The idea of inequality of 'high and low' is an evil, but I do not believe in eradicating evil from the human breast at the point of bayonet. The human breast does not lend itself to that means."[15]

But, this was not merely a question of ends and means, for, Gandhi's "non-violent Communism" meant not the overthrow of feudalism and capitalism without using force, but the "harmonious cooperation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant."

With regard to the relation between capital and labour, he wrote the following as early as 1925: "I have always said that my ideal is that capital and labour should supplement and help each other.

[14]M.K. Gandhi: *Constructive Programme* (1945 edition).

[15]*Harijan*, March 13, 1937.

They should be a great family living in unity and harmony, capital not only looking to the material welfare of the labourers but their moral welfare also—capitalists being trustees for the welfare of the labouring classes under them."[16]

It is true that he advised the zamindars to give the kisans "fixity of tenure, take a lively interest in their welfare, provide well-managed schools for their children, night schools for adults, hospitals and dispensaries for the sick, look after the sanitation of villages and in a variety of ways make them feel that they, the Zamindars, are their true friends taking only a fixed commission for their manifold services."[17] At the same time, he added: "Congressmen will, on their part, see to it that kisans scrupulously fulfil their obligations to the Zamindars. I mean not necessarily the statutory, but the obligations which they have themselves admitted to be just. They must reject the doctrine that their holdings are absolutely theirs to the exclusion of the Zamindars. They are, or should be, members of a joint family in which the Zamindar is the head, guarding their rights against encroachment."[18]

In an interview with a deputation of zamindars in 1934, he said : "Let me assure you that I shall be no party to dispossessing propertied classes of their private property without a just cause. My objective is to reach your heart and convert you so that you may hold all your property in trust for your tenants and use it primarily for their welfare.... Class war is foreign to the essential genius of India, which is capable of evolving Communism on the fundamental right of all to equal justice. Ramarajya of my dream ensures the rights alike of prince and pauper. You may be sure that I shall throw the whole weight of my influence in preventing class war. Supposing that there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property, you will find me fighting on your side."[19]

Thus, the Gandhian philosophy based on non-violence was in practice helpful to a social order based essentially on violence. The

[16] *Young India*, August 20, 1925.

[17] *Young India*, May 28, 1931.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] M.K. Gandhi: *Socialism of my Conception* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan), pp. 245-46.

national bourgeoisie used the Gandhian concept of non-violence skilfully in their simultaneous fight on two fronts, against British imperialism on the one hand, and against the organised movement of workers and peasants and the emerging forces of socialism on the other. Even Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose were perturbed at this development and expressed their dissatisfaction with what was called the "paradox of Gandhism." Nehru wrote: "For years I have puzzled over this problem: why with all his love and solicitude for the underdog he yet supports a system which inevitably produces it and crushes it; why with all his passion for non-violence he is in favour of a political and social structure which is wholly based on violence and coercion. Perhaps it is not correct to say that he is in favour of such a system. He is more or less a philosophical anarchist. But as the ideal anarchist state is too far off still and cannot easily be conceived, he accepts the present order."[20]

The principles of truth and non-violence were used by Gandhi even earlier to discourage the revolutionary terrorist movement in India. And on many crucial occasions when the anti-imperialist struggles assumed gigantic proportions, these principles were utilised in the attempt to restrict the scope of mass action. However, with the growth of the Indian working class as an independent force and with the emergence of new forms of struggle, the limitations of Gandhism and the inadequacy of Gandhian forms of struggle became more and more manifest. The trusteeship doctrine, which gave the capitalists and landlords the divine responsibility of looking after the interests of workers and peasants, came under attack from the new forces which appeared on the political scene. Young men, who had imbibed radical ideas and who desired to end all forms of exploitation as quickly as possible, opposed the theory of the privileged being the trustees of social welfare. How could the exploiting classes—landlords, capitalists and princes—be expected to look after the interests of the workers and peasants? How could it be denied that these so-called trustees had come into their positions, not because of any inherent personal qualities but merely

[20]Jawaharlal Nehru: *An Autobiography*, p. 515.

by inheritance and trickery? The new forces declared that the trusteeship doctrine was a reactionary theory meant to oppose the revolutionary struggle of the masses, and, thus, to keep the social structure intact. The socialist movement in India grew in opposition to this and many other concepts of Gandhism.

Gandhism arose as the ideology of the anti-imperialist movement in India under socio-economic conditions in which the working class and the peasantry had not attained significant class consciousness, and when the religio-ethical theories and other survivals of medievalist thought still appealed to wide sections of the people. It was under such conditions that the national bourgeoisie were able to use Gandhism to keep the people under their banner. But, once awakened and put to the test of organised struggle, the masses found Gandhism inadequate and began to search for new ideas and new methods of struggle. That is why many young men and women, who began their political life as staunch followers of Gandhi, turned in course of time to the advanced ideology of socialism and communism.

To point out the weaknesses and limitations of the Gandhian philosophy is not, however, to deny or belittle the great role played by Mahatma Gandhi in India's fight for freedom. His life was indeed dedicated to the sublime purpose of awakening the people to a new consciousness of their strength and greatness. Though his philosophical world outlook and many of his ideas and utterances were unscientific and even retrogressive, the fact remains that his spirit of sacrifice, his immense faith in the creative energy of the masses, his uncompromising crusade for communal harmony and social justice, his fight against untouchability, and above all, the purity and simplicity of his whole life and character, have illumined an entire era in the history of the Indian people—the era of India's final and decisive struggle for complete national independence. He dreamed of an India in which the poorest would feel a sense of belonging to the country, in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no high class and low class, an India in which all communities would live in perfect harmony.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE IMPACT OF MARXISM

THE First World War, as pointed out earlier, was followed by sweeping changes in every field of human life. The most outstanding political developments were the emergence of socialism as a mighty force and the birth of the Soviet Union. Ideas of socialism, no doubt, had begun to spread in India even earlier. Swami Vivekananda, for instance, had declared that a socialist society under the leadership of the labouring classes was the need of the time for India. In 1912, Ramakrishna Pillai, a progressive journalist and patriot of Kerala, published in Malayalam a biography of Karl Marx. But, it was the October Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the first working class state in the world which transformed socialism from what had been regarded as a utopian dream into a living reality. And this reality, along with the subsequent big advance of the working classes and communist movements, made socialism a force to reckon with. The impact of this was felt in every aspect of Indian life—political, economic and ideological.

It was during the postwar period that the Indian working class began to emerge as an independent political force, with its own programme and methods of action. The years 1918-20 saw the workers getting restive in various parts of the country. Strikes were launched not merely to back economic demands but as a protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and other atrocities committed by the British Government. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 intensified the growing unrest. Speaking about this new awakening, Lenin remarked in 1920: "British India is at the head of these countries, and their revolution is maturing in proportion to the growth of the industrial and railway proletariat, on the one hand, and to the increase in the brutal terrorism of the British who are more frequently resorting to massacre (Amritsar), public flogging, etc., on the other."[1]

[1]Lenin: *Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 731.

The leadership of the Indian National Congress had till then been preoccupied with the incongruous relation between religion and politics, and with the difficulties caused by feudal survivals like the caste system in the way of unification of the people. Many of the leaders, as we have noted, fought for social reform, for Hindu-Muslim unity and against the disabilities of the caste system. But, now they were faced with a new problem: the relation between the struggles of the working class and the anti-imperialist national movement. Some of the leaders of the national movement were alarmed by the new assertion of strength by a hitherto docile section, but many sympathised with their demands and some even took an active part in their fight against capitalist exploitation. Presiding over the annual session of the Congress in 1919, Motilal Nehru urged improvement of the living conditions of the workers and demanded that they should have the right to vote. The Lahore Congress of the following year adopted a resolution on the need to organise the workers. Some of the leaders began to insist that the Congress should pay more attention to the problems of the workers and peasants. C.R. Das, for example, said: "Let us organise them [workers and peasants] both from the point of view of their own special interests and also from the point of view of the higher ideal which demands satisfaction of their special interests and the devotion of such interests to the cause of Swaraj."

It was also in this period that the more progressive and the more militant among the fighters for freedom were attracted by Marxist ideas. By 1923, small communist groups came into existence in industrial centres like Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Cawnpore and Lahore. S.A. Dange, S.V. Ghate, Muzaffar Ahmed, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Singaravelu Chettiar and Saklatwala were the pioneers of the communist movement in India. Communist groups were formed also among the emigrants in Germany and the Soviet Union. Of them, M.N. Roy played an important part in the Second Congress of the Communist International which adopted the resolution on national and colonial questions.

The communist groups published a number of pamphlets and journals in different languages. Among the journals were "Socialist" in English, "Navayug" and, later, "Ganavanee" in

Bengali, "Kirti" in Marathi and "Inquilab" in Urdu. These publications fought for the cause of the workers and criticised the moderate policies of the Congress leadership, and disseminated Marxist ideas. Under the initiative of Satyabhakta and others, an All-India Conference was held in Cawnpore in December 1925 and a Communist Party of India was formed. But, due mainly to repression and internal differences, the party could not function effectively for some years. Meanwhile, workers' and peasants' parties and youth organisations were formed in different provinces. Communists and left-wing congressmen took active part in them.

The rise of Marxist ideas and the formation of the Communist Party of India strengthened still further the anti-imperialist movement in the country. The Communist Party advanced the demand for complete independence from British imperialism as against the demand of the Congress for Dominion Status. They not only fought in the forefront of the anti-imperialist struggle, but also helped the Indian people to understand the problems of building a socialist order of society. They called for the overthrow of feudalism and for a mass struggle for complete independence. While fighting imperialism and feudalism with vigour and determination, the communists at the same time raised their voice against the vacillations and compromising tactics of the national bourgeoisie.

The British Government and the reactionary elements among the national bourgeoisie tried on their part to raise a wall of hostility and prejudice against Marxism. They tried hard to isolate them from the national movement. The severest repression was let loose on them. Books dealing with Marxist ideology were banned. But, these attempts failed to suppress the Marxist movement because, apart from the fact that it embodied the most progressive world outlook, it gave a different orientation to the freedom movement and gave it a new content. Marxism showed the way not only to fight British imperialism more vigorously but also to the building of a new society without exploitation and oppression. Youth organisations which believed in the cult of the bomb and which wanted to combine mass struggles with terroristic activities began to reappraise their policies in the light of the new developments.

For instance, Bhagat Singh, leader of the Hindustan Republican Socialist Association, who was arrested for throwing bombs at the Government benches in the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1929, wrote from jail: "The nation can wage a successful struggle only on the strength of organised workers, kisans and the common people. It is my firm belief that we will not profit by bombs and pistols. This is clear from the history of the H.R.S.A. Our main objective should be to organise workers and kisans." Twenty days before he marched to the gallows, he wrote in a letter to the British Governor of Punjab: "The days of capitalist and imperialist exploitation are numbered. The war neither began with us nor is it going to end with our lives. It is the inevitable consequence of the historic events and the existing environments. Our humble sacrifices shall be only a link in the chain." Bhagat Singh was executed, but Marxism had come to stay in the life and thinking of the people. Speaking in the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1929, Motilal Nehru warned the rulers: "Can you erect barbed wire entanglements and artificial barriers to keep ideas out of India? The times are gone when you could do it."

And the Government themselves admitted in their official report for 1929-30: "Communist ideas nevertheless continued to spread among various sections of the industrial proletariat and also, to some extent, in rural India.... It is significant that several youth associations have adopted communist symbols and doctrines."

The emergence of Marxism, however, not only inspired the labouring masses in their struggles and roused them to fight for the freedom of their country, and to build a new social order in India; it marked also the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Indian thought.

It was a period when different ideas were contending for supremacy. On the one side, there were attempts to foster secularism and modern scientific thought. On the other, all kinds of religious and other revivalist ideas were encouraged and materialism and Marxism denounced as un-Indian. Many Indian philosophers, representing the upper classes and the right wing of the Congress became the spokesmen of idealism and metaphysics of one type or the other.

Yet, the impact of Marxism on Indian philosophical thought was irresistible, because it came in the context of a deepening crisis of the capitalist system. Despite periods of partial recovery and stabilisation, the world capitalist system was obviously suffering from a chronic malaise. The Great Depression of 1929-33 shook the economic and political foundations of the capitalist system. Mass unemployment, starvation, closing down of factories, impoverishment of millions of peasants and traders—all these shattered the faith of the world's peoples in the capitalist social order. No wonder that the crisis was reflected in the moral and intellectual fields also. A mood of pessimism and cynicism spread among the ideologists of the capitalist world. And on this Fascism thrived.

This was only one side of the picture, however. On the other side, the crisis led the more sober elements among the intellectuals to a reappraisal of their basic approach. The success of the First Five Year Plan of the Soviet Union, which abolished unemployment and exploitation once for all and led the Socialist state to prosperity in the midst of the world economic crisis, opened their eyes and they began to seek new paths of thought. And, naturally, the ascendant ideas and philosophy of Marxism appeared as a way out of the prevailing confusion.

The paradox of the situation was that this challenge to bourgeois values came precisely during a period of unprecedented advance in science and technology. With his new tools of knowledge, man found solutions to many riddles that had baffled him for long. The progress of science, practical and theoretical, opened out to him a new world with countless opportunities for fulfilment, provided he was prepared to shake off the fetters of the past. This rapid advance of science had its repercussions in the philosophical world, too.

Bourgeois thinkers throughout the world were faced with the problem of reconciling the new discoveries of science with the idealist beliefs and concepts nurtured by themselves. This they did by bringing forward postulates that the discoveries of science only confirmed the existence of an unknown and mysterious force beyond all human cognition. Idealism would not be stumped for an answer!

In India, these "restless years," as they were called in the West, were years of nationalist upheaval. The anti-imperialist movement had spread throughout the country. The peasant entered the national struggle in a big way. The middle classes were astir. The working class also by this time had become an organised force exerting considerable influence on events. It was under such conditions that the Marxist ideology began to attract the intellectual *elite* of the national movement. Jawaharlal Nehru said: "A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind, and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of the obscurity.... Much in the Marxist philosophical outlook, I would accept without difficulty, its monism and non-duality of mind and matter, the dynamics of matter and the dialectics of continuous change by evolution as well as leap, through action and interaction, cause and effect, thesis, antithesis and synthesis."[2]

In his autobiography, he wrote: "The whole value of Marxism seems to me to lie in its absence of dogmatism, in its stress on a certain outlook and mode of approach and in its attitude to action. That outlook helps us in understanding the social phenomena of our own times, and points out the way of action and escape."[3]

Nehru's attitude to Marxism indicates its impact on the new generation of political leadership in India. But, the appeal of Marxism and socialism was not confined to the active politicians. Poets, litterateurs and artists also came under its spell. Rabindranath Tagore, who visited the Soviet Union in 1930 and saw the vast changes taking place there, wrote in one of his letters: "The dumb have found their voice, the ignorant have cast the veil from their minds, the helpless have become conscious of their own power and those who were in the depths of degradation have come out of society's black hole to claim equality with everybody else. This is Soviet Russia's achievement in less than eight years' time."[4]

[2]J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, London, 1956, p. 15.

[3]J. Nehru: *Autobiography*.

[4]Tagore: *Letters from Russia*, p. 40.

In another letter, he wrote: "If I had not seen with my own eyes, I could never have believed that even within ten years' time lakhs of people, sunk in ignorance and humiliation, could not only be made literate but given the dignity of manhood."[5]

Tagore warmly appreciated the self-sacrificing efforts of the Soviet people to industrialise their once backward country: "They have taken the grim vow of making the whole country efficient by the use of the machine, utilising electric and steam power. They dare not prolong the time, because against the opposition of the entire capitalist world it is imperative that they should be able to produce wealth as quickly as possible on their own." He paid special attention to the solution of the agrarian problem in the Soviet Union, and said that it corresponded to his own long-cherished ideas: "First that the right to the land does not morally belong to the landlord, but to the peasant; secondly, agriculture will never improve unless land can be collectively cultivated by cooperative methods."

Dr. Radhakrishnan observed in 1942: "Even its worst critics cannot deny that Soviet Russia is a tremendous experiment, more important than the American and French Revolutions. It is an attempt to recast the entire structure, political, economic and social, of the whole community of nearly two hundred millions occupying a sixth of the earth's land surface on the lines of the theory of society propounded by certain social thinkers. In the course of two decades the landlord and the capitalist have disappeared, and individual enterprise is limited to small-scale undertakings of peasants and handicraftsmen." He continued: "The socialist programme of the Marxist is more adequate to the real needs of mankind and to the exigencies of production by modern technical means. The demand for socialism is a moral demand."[6] At the same time, he made it clear that he did not agree with the philosophy of Marxism. He wrote: "In its concern for the poor and the lowly, in its demand for a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity, in its insistence on social equality, it gives us a social message with which all idealists are in agreement. But our sympathy for the

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[6] Radhakrishnan: *Religion and Society*, p. 25.

social programme does not necessarily commit us to the Marxist philosophy of life, its atheistic conception of ultimate reality, its naturalistic view of man, and its disregard of the sacredness of personality. To sympathise with Marxism as an effective instrument for social revolution is different from accepting its metaphysical background."[7]

What Radhakrishnan forgets is the fact that the social message that Marxism gave us was an inevitable outcome of its philosophy and its ethical approach to man's problems. As he himself admits, "socialism is a moral demand."

It is true that the philosophy of Marxism is based on materialism which holds that matter in motion is the fundamental constituent of the universe. But, the atheistic conception of ultimate reality is not necessarily the denial of spiritual values or, for that matter, the sacredness of human personality. As we have shown in these pages, belief in God as the ultimate reality or as the creator of the world has not always been a necessary condition for spiritual orientation. Marxism, which arose in the West as a logical development of the humanist values embodied in the teachings of the philosophers of the Renaissance and the Reformation and of the progressive thinkers who followed them, and which represented a movement against man's alienation and dehumanisation inherent in the growth of capitalism, was certainly in keeping with the spiritual traditions of India, because it aimed, above all, at the emancipation of man from the shackles of dehumanising social and class forces and the full realisation of his dignity and personality. But, Marx knew that this ideal could be realised only in the proper social and economic conditions. He was the first philosopher to see man historically in his full concreteness as a member of a given social system and a given class. The transformation of social conditions through the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production and exchange, and the establishment of the rule of the working people paving the way for a classless society was, therefore, a prerequisite for the spiritual emancipation of man and for the unfettered development of his personality.

[7] *Ibid.*

It appears that what Radhakrishnan wanted was not a total rejection of Marxism, but a synthesis of idealism and Marxist philosophy. The fact that, in spite of such reservations, he valued the positive nature of Marxism showed the extent of the influence of Marxism even on idealist thinkers.

Many political activists accepted Marxism out of an ideological impulse which represented a revolt against the inhuman realities of oppression and exploitation on the one hand and a protest against the compromising policies of the national bourgeois leadership on the other. Marxism not only inspired them with the will for a revolutionary transformation of society, but imparted a new meaning to life itself, and endowed it with a purpose. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, "because of this wide and comprehensive outlook, the real understanding communist develops to some extent an organic sense of social life. Politics for him ceases to be a mere record of opportunism or a groping in the dark. The ideal and objectives he works for give a meaning to the struggles and to the sacrifices he willingly faces. He feels that he is part of a grand army marching forward to realise human fate and destiny, and he has the sense of marching step by step with history."

It may, however, be noted that there were many obstacles in the path of development of Marxist ideas in India. In the first place, the British rulers, through their policy of brutal repression and totalitarian censorship, tried to prevent the spread of Marxist ideas to any considerable extent. Those who were attracted to Marxism had to rely mainly on its distorted versions mostly written by anti-communists.

Secondly, not only the communists but also many non-communist middle class intellectuals identified Marxism with the socialism that was being built in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Stalin. They were naturally inspired by the abolition of the capitalist system of exploitation and the unprecedented development of productive forces in the first land of socialism. But, there were also some unattractive anti-humanist aspects which manifested themselves especially in the late thirties under the cult of Stalin's personality. The negative aspects of Stalin's rule were considered by many as the inevitable outcome of the philosophy of Marxism.

Thirdly, the dogmatic rigidity and the sectarian approach of the Indian communists could not but antagonise many progressive non-communist intellectuals. What was needed was not the repetition of jargons and formulas, but the adaptation, modification and reformulation of Marx's teachings in accordance with the concrete socio-economic conditions, national peculiarities and cultural traditions of India in order to show to the people that acceptance of Marxism was not a departure from the progressive humanistic trends in Indian thought, but its logical continuation to suit the new situation. But, Marxism was treated not as a guide to action but as a dogma. The tendency to invest everything Marx, Lenin or Stalin wrote with scriptural authority and to regard their teachings as the last word in human history not only curtailed the scientific spirit of the communists but hindered the development of Marxist thought itself.

Fourthly, the reliance of the communists on a superficial and oversimplified understanding of Marxism and their inability to analyse concretely the specific Indian conditions in their full historical perspective and to evolve correct policies for action led them to the tactics of dissociating themselves from the mainstream of the anti-imperialist movement which was developing under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. Their failure to translate Marxism into Indian terms led them to a certain isolation and made them largely ineffective in shaping the policies of the struggle for complete independence and making a sufficient impact on the real course of developments.

In spite of such shortcomings, Marxism, slowly but surely, began to take roots in the country, because it corresponded to the historic need of social development.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

THE many facets of the genius of Jawaharlal Nehru are already part of history. We shall not, however, be able to understand the great emancipator's ideals and policies unless we get an insight into the underlying philosophy and the way it shaped his thought.

Nehru's philosophical outlook was not the product of a leisurely life isolated from the surrounding turmoils. It was born in conflicts and struggles. To Nehru, philosophy was a method and conscious guide to change the existing *milieu* and establish a new social order free from exploitation and oppression, from hunger, disease and ignorance. It was the outcome of his profound faith in the creative vitality of the people of his country.

Born in an aristocratic family in an era of national awakening, Jawaharlal Nehru had in his early days a sheltered, almost pampered, life. But, everything changed with the quickening tempo of the political situation in the country. The First World War and its aftermath, the Home Rule agitation led by Tilak and Annie Besant, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the widespread protest movement—all these made a great impact on young Jawaharlal's sensitive mind.

The fight between the moderates and the extremists was still continuing within the Congress. Motilal's sympathies were with the moderates, but the younger Nehru was attracted to the extremists. He started his political life as a disciple of Tilak and Besant, and then Mahatma Gandhi appeared on the scene. It was the beginning of a new era in the history of India's struggle for freedom, and Jawaharlal joined the fray in response to Gandhi's call. In 1921, he had his first taste of imprisonment under the alien Raj. After the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement, he came into intimate contact with the peasant masses; and their poverty, degradation and misery moved him. He became convinced that political freedom had no meaning if it did not help to eradicate hunger, ignorance and squalor.

Nehru's political horizon gradually widened. His sojourn in European countries, his visit to the Soviet Union in 1927, the new anti-imperialist ferment, the world crisis of capitalism and the success of the Soviet Union's First Five Year Plan—all these brought him under the powerful influence of the socialist ideal. He felt strongly that capitalism had exhausted its progressive potentialities and that socialism was the only answer to the challenge of the future.

While in Europe, he took part in the Brussels Congress of Colonial Peoples in 1927, and along with world-renowned intellectuals like Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein and Soong Ching Ling, founded the International League against Imperialism and for National Independence. "The Brussels Congress," he wrote, "as well as the subsequent committee meetings of the League, which were held in various places from time to time, helped me to understand some of the problems of colonial and dependent countries."[1] His tour of European countries also gave him an insight into the activities of the various progressive movements and their inner conflicts. His sympathies were generally with the Communist Parties under the Third International founded by Lenin. "As between the Labour worlds of the Second International and the Third International," he declared, "my sympathies were with the latter."

Returning to India, he plunged himself into anti-imperialist activities with renewed vigour and a clearer perspective. He gave a new form and content to the struggle for freedom. To him, political freedom was no more an end in itself. It was a means to a further end—the way to socialism. He declared in his presidential address at the Lahore session of the Congress, which declared complete independence as India's ultimate goal: "I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican and I am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy."

Stormy years lay ahead. The civil disobedience movement led

[1] J. Nehru: *Autobiography*, p. 163

)y Gandhi electrified the whole country. Thousands braved lathi :harges and arrests. Jawaharlal also had a taste of official brutality vhen he got a beating from mounted police. But, sufferings only :teeled Nehru's temper. He spent his days in jail writing a history)f the world. He was perhaps the first Indian writer who surveyed indian history in the context of world developments and the struggle 'or India's freedom as part of the worldwide struggle against mperialism. He dived deep into India's past not as an academic :tudent of history but as an active participant in the fight for freedom ınd for a new social order. He wanted to give a historical pers-)ective to the nationalist movement and to discover the laws which ;overned social development and the fast-changing mores of :ontemporary society.

Nehru came out of jail as a great national hero, and found himself gain in the thick of the struggle. His ideas of socialism met vith a wider response. At the Lucknow Congress in 1936, he said: 'I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's)roblems and of India's problems lies in socialism, and when I ıse this word I do so not in a vague, humanitarian way, but in a cientific, economic sense." Socialism is, however, something ven more than an economic doctrine: "It is a philosophy of life nd as such also appeals to me. I see no way of ending the poverty, he vast unemployment, the degradation, and the subjection of the ndian people except through socialism. That involves vast and evolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the nding of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal nd autocratic Indian States system. That means the ending of rivate property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement f the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service. t means ultimately a change in our instincts, habits and desires. t means a new civilization, radically different from the present apitalist order."[1]

Thus, for Nehru, socialism was not merely an economic system, ut a philosophy of life. Socialism was necessary not only to anish from India poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease and

[1] J. Nehru: *India and the World*, pp. 82-3.

squalor, but to develop human personality. In a letter written to Subhas Chandra Bose in 1939, he stated: "I suppose I am temperamentally and by training an individualist, and intellectually a socialist, whatever all this may mean. I hope that socialism does not kill or suppress individuality; indeed I am attracted to it because it will release innumerable human beings from economic and cultural bondage."[3]

Nehru's world outlook was the outcome of his study of Marxist thought, his understanding of the laws of social development and his scientific attitude to life. He laid stress on the fact that the real value of Marxism lay in its absence of dogmatism and its scientific attitude to realities, which enabled man to understand the complex social phenomena and change them to the benefit of humanity. He always abhorred barren dogma and blind bigotry. He even criticised the Communists for repeating Marxist principles like dogmas instead of trying to understand the Indian reality. "Normally speaking," he wrote, "in a country like India with large numbers of people on the verge of starvation and the economic structure cracking up, communism should have a wide appeal. In a sense there is that vague appeal, but the Communist Party cannot take advantage of it because it has cut itself off from the springs of national sentiment and speaks in a language which finds no echo in the hearts of the people. It remains an energetic, but small group, with no real roots."[4]

The problem of ends and means played an important part in Nehru's world outlook. He never subscribed to the view that the end justified the means. Wrong actions would produce only wrong results, because ends and means were intimately connected. He explained: "I think that there is always a close and intimate relationship between the end we aim at and the means adopted to attain it. Even if the end is right, but the means are wrong, it will vitiate the end or divert us in a wrong direction. Means and ends are thus intimately and inexorably connected and cannot be separated. That indeed has been the lesson of old taught us by

[3]J. Nehru: *A Bunch of Letters*, p. 353.

[4]J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 530.

many great men in the past, but unfortunately it is seldeom remembered."[5]

Nehru was convinced that the emergence of the Soviet Union had opened a new era in the history of mankind. But, he was critical of the negative features in Soviet society. "Often I disliked or did not understand some developments there," he wrote, "and it seemed to me too closely concerned with the opportunism of the moment or the power politics of the day."[6] In another place, he wrote: "I had long been drawn to socialism and communism and Russia had appealed to me. Much in Soviet Russia I dislike—the ruthless suppression of all contrary opinion, the wholesale regimentation, the unnecessary violence (as I thought) in carrying out various policies."[7] But, despite all these, he had no doubt that "the Soviet Revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered and that it had laid the foundations for that new civilization towards which the world could advance."[8] Again: "I look upon that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age. If the future is full of hope, it is largely because of Soviet Russia and what it has done, and I am convinced that if some world catastrophe does not intervene, this new civilization will spread to other lands and put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds."[9]

Thanks to the enormous prestige he had acquired as a radical leader of the national struggle for freedom, Nehru's attitude to Marxism and socialism and the Soviet Union influenced the thinking of a large section of the people, particularly the younger generation of the thirties and afterwards. At the same time, the champions of vested interests and some of the rightist leaders of the Congress like Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajagopalachari resented the radical ideas of Nehru. They even threatened to resign from the Congress Working Committee of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the

[5] J. Nehru: *Speeches* (1949-53), p. 396.
[6] J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 15.
[7] J. Nehru: *Autobiography*, p. 361.
[8] J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 15.
[9] J. Nehru: *Presidential Address at the Lucknow Congress*, 1936.

president. "We feel," wrote Rajendra Prasad and the other right-wingers, "that preaching and emphasising socialism, particularly at this stage, by the president and other socialist members of the Working Committee, while the Congress has not adopted it, is prejudicial to the best interests of the country and to the success of the national struggle for freedom which we all hold to be the first and paramount concern of the country."[10]

Jawaharlal wanted the Congress organisation to declare socialism as its goal. But, it was not an easy task; for, most of the important leaders of the Congress including Mahatma Gandhi were opposed to Nehru's conception of socialism. Nehru himself stated: "I should like the Congress to become a socialist organization and to join hands with other forces in the world which are working for a new civilization. But I realize that the majority in the Congress may not be prepared to go thus far.... Most of us hestitate, because of our nationalist backgrounds, to take a step which might frighten away the vested interests. Most of these interests are already ranged against us, and we can expect little from them except opposition even in the political struggle."

Nehru did not want to break away from the Congress. He did not want to antagonise Mahatma Gandhi who had earlier admonished him for his haste in moving the complete independence resolution at the Madras session of the Congress in 1927. He, therefore, decided to go slow, cautiously, patiently. On the one hand, he tried to adjust his ideas to the level of thinking of the Congress; on the other, he persuaded the Congress organisation to adjust its thinking to the changing times and the progressive aspirations of the people. He succeeded in bringing his world outlook to the national movement which, under his leadership, became a part of the world front for freedom and democracy against the dark forces of imperialism, fascism, reaction and war. He was one with the Soviet Union and other progressive forces in their endeavour to build a common front against fascism and war.

It was a period when the British imperialists and political reaction in the country were encouraging all kinds of communalism

[10]Quoted in Michael Brecher: *Nehru*, p. 224.

and separatism. On one side, the protagonists of conservative Hinduism with their slogan of "Hindi Hindu Hindustan" were seeking to "Hinduise politics and militarise Hinduism." V.D. Savarkar asserted that Hindus alone constituted the Indian nation: "They [Hindus] possess the same culture, because Hindus alone possess a common Rashtra, and a common *Sanskriti* and accept India not only as motherland and fatherland but also their holy land i.e., *Punya Bhumi*. They alone constitute the Indian Nation." M. S. Golwalkar, the leader of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.) went one step further and declared that Indian Muslims were a foreign race and as such were not entitled even to citizens' rights. Developing his view of what should be the fate of Muslims and other non-Hindus in the country, he wrote in 1939: "... non-Hindu peoples in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age-long traditions but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights. There is... no other course for them to adopt."[11] In 1933, Bhai Parmanand, then president of the Hindu Mahasabha, ridiculed the slogan of Hindu-Muslim unity and even opposed Gandhi's campaign for the right of low caste Hindus to enter temples in which high caste Hindus worshipped. Addressing the Ajmer session of the Hindu Mahasabha in October 1933, he said: "The Hindu Mahasabha, all along following the policy of remaining neutral on religious questions, cannot bring any pressure to bear on the followers of a particular sect to open their temples to any other class for which the temples were not supposed to be meant."

On the other side, Muslim League leaders were speaking about "Muslim Culture," a "Muslim Nation" in India, and the utter

[11]M. S. Golwalkar: *We or the Nationhood Defined*, p. 55.

incompatibility of Hindu and Muslim cultures. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, observed in 1940: "It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of your troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time."[12]

Nehru vigorously opposed these notions and pointed out that religious interpretations of culture and nation were not only unscientific but harmful. To talk of a "Muslim nation," he observed, "means that there is no nation at all but a religious bond; it means that no nation in the modern sense must be allowed to grow; it means that modern civilization should be discarded and we should go back to the medieval ways; it means either autocratic government or a foreign government; it means, finally, just nothing at all except an emotional state of mind and a conscious or unconscious desire not to face realities, especially economic realities."[13]

Nehru admitted that there were racial and cultural differences in India, but these differences had nothing to do with religious divisions. "If a person is converted to another religion, he does not change his historical make-up or his racial characteristics or to any great extent his cultural background. Cultural types are national, not religious, and modern conditions are helping in the development of an international type."[14] And he declared: "Not only do I believe that a unitary Indian nation is possible but that fundamentally and culturally, it exists in spite of numerous superficial differences."

Jawaharlal Nehru tried to analyse the growth of communalism historically and to find out the economic motives underlying it. He noticed that behind the struggle for jobs and percentages of seats in legislatures on the part of communal politicians on both

[12]Wm. Theodore de Bary and others: *Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 836.

[13]J. Nehru: *An Autobiography*.

[14]J. Nehru: *Recent Essays and Writings*, 1937.

sides, there was a much more important issue which was not exactly communal but which influenced the communal question. In certain provinces, the richer classes were on the whole Hindus and the Muslims were the poorer classes. The conflict between the two was, therefore, often economic, but it was always given a communal colouring. He explained:

"The Hindus were on the whole the better-off community. Having taken to English education earlier, they had got most of the government jobs. They were richer also. The village financier or banker was the Bania who exploited the small landholders and tenants and gradually reduced them to beggary and himself took possession of the land. The Bania exploited Hindu and Muslim tenants and landholders alike, but his exploitation of Muslims took a communal turn, especially in provinces where the agriculturists were mainly Muslim. The spread of machine-made goods probably hit the Muslims harder than the Hindus, as there were relatively more artisans among the Muslims. All these factors went to increase the bitterness between the two major communities in India and to strengthen Muslim nationalism, which looked to the community rather than to the country.... To combat them on their own communal lines Hindu communal organisations grew into prominence. Posing as true nationalists, they were as sectarian and narrow as the others."[15]

But, one communalism did not end the other; each fed and fattened on the other. Hindu communalism increased the communalism of the Muslims and made them distrust the Hindus all the more. Nehru repeatedly pointed out that communalism was a weapon in the hands of political and social reactionaries to obstruct the anti-imperialist struggle and preserve the privileges of the upper classes. He believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was essential to defeat them. And, in this, a special responsibility lay on the Hindus because they were the majority community and, economically and educationally, they were on the whole more advanced than the Muslims.

Nehru was of the view that real nationalism could only grow

[15] J. Nehru: *Glimpses of World History*.

out of the ideological fusion of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh and other groups in India. This did not mean extinction of the diversity in India's cultural pattern, but the development of a common national outlook. "I do not think," he said, "that Hindu-Muslim or other unity will come by merely reciting it like a mantra. That it will come, I have no doubt, but it will come from below, not above, for many of those above are too much interested in British domination, and hope to preserve their special privileges through it. Social and economic forces will inevitably bring other problems to the front. They will create cleavages along different lines but the communal cleavages will go."[16]

But, in spite of his efforts, Nehru found that the Hindu-Muslim problem was becoming more difficult and more complicated. The growth of communalism in India was in fact a specific and concrete problem and demanded a concrete solution. But, Nehru could not succeed in finding a way out. He himself admitted this failure in his letter to Jinnah written on 18 October 1939: "... I am ashamed of myself, in so far as I have not been able to contribute anything substantial to the solution in a friendly way [of the Hindu-Muslim problem].... My own mind moves on a different plane and most of my interests lie in other directions. And so, though I have given much thought to the problem and understand most of its implications, I feel as if I was an outsider, and alien in spirit."[17]

The problem of Hindu-Muslim relations deteriorated further during the Second World War and culminated in the partition of the country in 1947. But, communalism did not end with Partition. It continued and became a growing menace to the healthy development of the nation. In 1955, he observed: "They [communalists] are only a relic of some ancient period. They are hung neither in the past nor in the present, they are in mid-air. India tolerates everybody and everything, including mad men, they also exist and carry on.... But let us not forget that their [the communalists'] trend of thought is a dangerous trend. It is a trend full of hatred. It is a trend that is bad for India today. If we

[16]J. Nehru: *Recent Essays and Writings.*

[17]J. Nehru: *A Bunch of Old Letters*, pp. 392-93.

maintain this kind of communalism, whether it is Hindu or Muslim, Christian or Sikh, India will cease to be what it is today. It will go to pieces."

Nehru acknowledged the cultural role played by the various religions and the "many fine types of men and women" produced by them, in giving "a set of values to human life" although some of these values had no application to the present-day realities. Religion, in the wider sense of the term, dealt with the uncharted regions of human experience, "that is, by the scientific positive knowledge of the day," and had helped greatly in the development of human thought and had in a way stabilised society. "But with all the good they have done," he pointed out, "they have also tried to imprison truths in set forms and dogma, and encouraged ceremonials and practices which soon lose all their original meaning and become mere routine. While impressing upon him the awe and mystery of the unknown that surrounds him on all sides, they have discouraged him from trying to understand not only the unknown but what might come in the way of social effort. Instead of encouraging curiosity and thought, they have preached the philosophy of submission to nature, to the established church, to the prevailing social order, and to everything that is. The belief in a supernatural agency which ordains everything has led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plane, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought and inquiry."[18]

Nehru's approach was basically conditioned by the scientific outlook. He believed in the possibility of scientific methods even in regard to emotional and religious experiences. He, therefore, stood four-square against the obsolete ways of life still widely followed by large sections of the people under the influence of religious and social dogmas. He denounced in the sharpest terms superstitions, obscurantism, bigotry and outmoded beliefs, and criticised the tendency among the people to rely too much on meaningless rituals, astrology, etc. He declared: "Religion, as I saw it practised and accepted even by thinking minds, whether

[18]J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India.*

it was Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, and uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural."[19] Elsewhere, he wrote: "Social evils, most of which are certainly capable of removal, are attributed to original sin, to the unalterableness of human nature or the social structure, or (in India) to the inevitable legacy of previous births. Thus one drifts away from even the attempt to think rationally and scientifically and takes refuge in irrationalism, superstition and unreasonable and inequitable social practices."[20]

Religion manifested itself as irrational and superstitious practices and also as mysticism, spiritualism and metaphysics. Nehru admitted that there had been great, unselfish and attratctive mystics who could not easily be disposed of as self-deluded fools. Yet, mysticism, in the narrow sense of the term, irritated him because, "it appears to be vague, soft and flabby, not a rigorous discipline of the mind, but a surrender of mental faculties, and a being in a sea of emotional experience."[21] Again, he said: "Spiritualism with its seances and its so-called manifestations of spirits and the like has always seemed to me a rather absurd and impertinent way of investigating psychic phenomena and the mysteries of the after-life."[22]

An element of agnosticism was always present in his writings. It is true that he was prepared to accept much of the world outlook of Marxism and the philosophy of dialectical materialism and apply them to the conditions of India and the contemporary world. But, it would be fallacious to contend that his philosophical views were consistently Marxist. In the "Discovery of India," for example, after acknowledging the acceptability of "much" in the Marxist philosophical outlook, he stated: "It did not satisfy me completely, nor did it answer all the questions in my mind,

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

and almost unawares, a vague idealist approach would creep into my mind, something rather akin to 'Vedanta' approach. It was not a difference between mind and matter, but rather of something that lay beyond the mind."[23]

This agnostic viewpoint was explicitly expressed in the following words: "Whether there is such a thing as a soul, whether there is survival after death or not, I do not know, and important as these questions are, they do not trouble me in the least. The environment in which I have grown up takes the soul (or rather the atma) and a future life, the Karma theory of cause and effect and re-incarnation for granted. I have been affected by this, and so, in a sense I am favourably disposed towards these assumptions. There might be a soul which survives the physical death of the body, and a theory of cause and effect governing life's actions seems reasonable though it leads to obvious difficulties when one thinks of the ultimate cause. Presuming a soul, there appears to be some logic also in the theory of incarnation."[24] But, he did not hesitate to add: "I do not believe in any of these or other theories and assumptions as a matter of religious faith. They are just intellectual speculations in an unknown region about which we know next to nothing. They do not affect my life, and whether they are proved right or wrong subsequently, they would make little difference to me."

It appears that the essence of Nehru's philosophical outlook was conditioned by his unquenchable faith in a high and noble mission of life. In his autobiography, he quoted Romain Rolland who was of the view that all those who turned fearlessly towards the search for truth with singleminded devotion, nationalists, humanitarians, socialists, communists and even rationalists, could be considered religious, because their mission presupposed faith in an end which was higher than the life of existing society, and even higher than the life of humanity as a whole. And, in this sense, Nehru said, he had no objection to being called religious. In other words, his manifold activities were permeated with a higher purpose. He believed that the economic, social and political

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

uplift of man must necessarily be combined with his spiritual renovation. "I am not wedded to any dogma or religion," he said in 1960, "but I do believe whether one calls it religion or not in the innate spirituality of human beings. I do believe in the innate dignity of the individual. I do believe that every individual should be given equal opportunity. I believe as an ideal—it may be difficult to reach it—in an egalitarian society with no great differences; I dislike the vulgarity of the rich as much as the poverty of the poor."

It is difficult to say whether his conception of ethics evolved out of his scientific outlook, or Gandhism or Marxism or his agnostic spiritual yearnings or out of a synthesis of all these. But, whatever the source, he was emphatic that an ethical approach to life's problems was essential. "Some kind of ethical approach to life," he wrote, "has a strong appeal for me though it will be difficult for me to justify it logically. I have been attracted by Gandhiji's stress on right means, and I think one of his greatest contributions to public life has been this emphasis." He felt that Marxist philosophy, at least as it was practised by the Communist Parties, was lacking in this emphasis. He stated: "I realised that the moral approach is a changing one and depends upon the growing mind and an advancing civilization. It is conditioned by the mental climate of the age. Yet there was something more to it than that, certain basic urges which had greater permanence. I did not like the frequent divorce in communist practice, as in others, betweeen action and these basic urges or principles. So there was an odd mixture in my mind which I could not rationally explain or resolve. There was a general tendency not to think too much of those fundamental questions which seemed to be beyond reach, but rather to concentrate on the problems of life, to understand in the narrower and more immediate sense what should be done and how."

The approaches of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to the problems facing the country were often divergent. Yet, they influenced each other. Gandhi tried to adjust himself to the ideas propounded by Nehru, and Nehru's effort, it seems, was to arrive at a synthesis between Marxian ideology and Gandhi's peaceful

approach and purity of means. This background made it easier for him to face the problems posed after the Second World War.

India became free in 1947 and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected Prime Minister of India. He was at the helm of affairs till his death in 1964. All these years, he worked untiringly to translate his principles and policies into practice with his characteristic accent on the democratic way of life and peaceful methods. He explained his views as follows:

> "In India we have entered belatedly into the phase of industrial revolution. We have done so at a time when parts of the world are in the jet and nuclear age. We have thus, in effect, to proceed simultaneously with both these revolutionary changes and this involves a tremendous burden. We have accepted socialism as our goal not only because it seems to us right and beneficial, but because there is no other way for the solution of our economic problems. It is sometimes said that rapid progress cannot take place by peaceful and democratic methods and that authoritarian and coercive methods have to be adopted. I do not accept this proposition. Indeed, in India today any attempt to discard democratic methods would lead to disruption and would thus put an end to any immediate prospect of progress.... The mighty task we have undertaken demands the fullest cooperation from the masses of our people. That cooperation cannot come unless we put forward an objective which is acceptable to them and which promises them results. The change we seek necessitates burdens on our people, even those who can least bear them; unless they realise that they are partners in the building up of a society which will bring them benefits, they will not accept these burdens or give their full cooperation."

Nehru realised that India could progress only on the basis of modern science and technology. But, at the same time, he emphasised that without moral and spiritual development, all the scientific and material advances might not be worthwhile. He pleaded, therefore, for "a balance between the body and the spirit, and between man as part of nature and man as part of society."

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

THE attainment of political independence in August 1947, followed by the establishment of a republican form of state in 1950, was a turning point in the history of India. Political independence created the necessary prerequisites for the economic, social, cultural and spiritual advancement of the country. But, the possibilities of a better social order could be turned into reality only through hard, sustained effort; for, the remnants of two hundred years of colonial rule were still powerful. Political freedom did not mean ending of the colonial nature of India's economy. British capital remained. So did feudal vestiges. The disequilibrium in the economy created by the war and the dislocation and disruption of the productive forces caused by Partition worsened the situation. Inflation, scarcity of essential goods, unemployment and the threat of famine created unrest among the people. All the main symptoms of a basically underdeveloped economy appeared in the body politic.

The new national bourgeois ruling class was confronted with the task not only of arresting this economic malaise as quickly as possible, but of ushering in a better social order, suited to the requirements of an awakened people trying to catch up with the advanced nations. The aim of the anti-imperialist national movement was not merely the attainment of political freedom. Year after year, our people had taken the pledge to achieve complete independence which included economic, social and cultural freedom as well. Demands for economic justice, equal opportunities and the ending of coercion and exploitation were embodied in the resolutions of most of the progressive parties. The resolution of the Karachi Congress in 1931 had declared specifically that "in order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions." The time had now come to fulfil these hopes and aspirations. The conditions were quite favourable, too. Imperialism had been

not succeed in leading the country to the cherished goal? How was it that, contrary to his wishes, the monopoly groups tightened their grip on the economy? Perhaps, the difficulties and the reactionary opposition that confronted him were too formidable and he had to yield to the pressure of some of his own colleagues who accepted his principles and ideals only formally. Perhaps, it was due to the contradictions and conflicting pulls of the social order he had to maintain as the head of a bourgeois state. Or, possibly, it was due to the weaknesses, deficiencies and disunity of the progressive democratic sections which failed to strengthen his hands.

But, whatever the shortcomings of his ideology in precept and practice, Jawaharlal Nehru gave a progressive, scientific orientation to the mind of the younger generation. The sweep and boldness of his vision and his shining ideals have inspired millions to march forward to freedom, democracy and socialism.

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weakened as a result of the war and its aftermath, and socialism was emerging as a decisive force in world politics. The economic and scientific achievements of the Soviet Union, the establishment of socialist governments in a number of countries, the liberation of large parts of Asia and Africa from the yoke of colonialism and the emergence of progressive movements the world over—all these developments had their influence on the mind of India. Of equal importance was the advance of science and technology, especially in harnessing nuclear energy and other sources of power, creating the possibility of an unprecedented development of productive powers.

The significance of these world developments was not lost on the leadership in India. Availing themselves of the immense opportunities offered by the new world situation, they launched a series of Five Year Plans for national regeneration. And, as a result of these efforts, the hold of imperialism and feudalism on the national economy has certainly weakened and India has advanced perceptibly towards industrialisation. But, the fact remains that, in spite of these achievements, national development is taking place within the framework of capitalism. The national bourgeoisie strive, on the one hand, to overcome the economic backwardness inherited from colonialism by speedy industrialisation with emphasis on heavy industries and the public sector and by the development of agriculture, but, on the other, they tighten their grip on the economy and grab the lion's share of the wealth produced by the nation. This has inevitably led to intensification of class contradictions and the growth of discontent among the people.

The Constitution of India has laid down that the State shall so direct its policy "that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment." But, capitalism obeys no law other than its own. Accentuation of inequalities is inherent in its very system. Big industrialists who have come into more money resources and more profitable modern techniques push weaker concerns out of business, causing thereby the concentration of wealth and the growth of monopolies. Modern enterprises sound the death-knell of thousands of artisans and craftsmen. Towns propser at the

cost of the villages. Some regions advance while others lag behind. The rich grow richer and the poor remain weak, the disparity between the two getting steadily wider.

Economic planning in India has already resulted in an increasing polarisation of class forces. On the one hand, monopoly groups, aligning with feudal survivals and reactionary politicians and collaborating with foreign monopolies, endeavour to fortify their position with a view to seizing commanding positions in the country's economy. On the other, the forces fighting against monopoly groups and feudal vestiges are also gaining in strength. An important economic factor contributing to this struggle is the growth of small- and medium-sized industries. New bourgeois elements come up in hitherto backward states. Industrialisation and agrarian reforms, however limited their scope, have tended to urbanise the rural rich. The increase in educational facilities, resulting in a sudden spurt in the number of professional people and specialists, has strengthened the ranks of the intelligentsia who under present conditions take a progressive stand against the monopoly groups. The working classes are also better organised and more politically conscious than before, and their power has grown with the advance in industrialisation. And apart from the progressive traditions of the national movement, there has been a growing awareness in recent years that independence will remain unstable and precarious as long as foreign and Indian monopolies dominate the economy and feudal forces survive.

Within the framework of capitalism, industrialisation under the Five Year Plans has certainly accelerated the growth of productive forces not only in towns but in the countryside, too. It is true that heavy industries still lag behind, economic dependence on wealthier industrialised nations continues and India is still among the underdeveloped countries. But, the slow but sure transition from a predominantly agricultural to a mixed agro-industrial economy is undoubtedly bringing about far-reaching changes in the social and occupational structure of the population. Millions of people with a peasant background have given up their traditional and ancestral occupations and found jobs outside agriculture. While people from the villages migrate to towns in search

of jobs, industrialisation and modern technology change the face of the rural areas. Transport facilities have diminished the distance between village and town and have increased the contact of villagers with townsfolk. The use of agricultural machinery, tractors, chemical fertilisers, irrigation and electricity, radio, cinema, automotive transport, books, newspapers and libraries, brings modernity into the rural life. With the increase in educational opportunities, engineers, technicians, doctors and teachers come not only from the upper classes, but from the middle classes and working masses including the peasantry. These changes naturally influence the way of life of the people, and their mode of thinking.

The transition from an underdeveloped, semi-feudal society to an economically independent, modern, industrial nation is not merely a matter of adding to the existing factories or the establishment of new large-scale mechanised plants. It involves new social relations, new habit-patterns and a new way of life. It is accompanied by a modern world outlook based on reason and verifiable knowledge, which is incompatible with precapitalist religious dogmas, theological superstitions and mystical intuitions. This new world outlook comprises new values like individual liberty, fraternity, democracy and socialism. In other words, economic planning, industrialisation, nationalisation, agrarian reforms and non-alignment are not ends in themselves. They are the means to build a better social order in which the blessings of science, technology, art and literature are enjoyed by the entire people—a society in which economic, social and spiritual exploitation of man by man ceases to exist, and in which, utilising the abundance of material wealth, man develops his personality to the fullest extent. But, the old social structure of India has not been completely unsettled to make way for the requirements of the present. The process of development is so halting and uneven that modernity is intermingled with primitiveness in the country's towns and villages. Regional disparities highlight the imbalance in planning and add to popular discontent. There are differences between those who have come in contact with the new and desire change, and those who are only slightly affected by the impact

of industrialisation and still cling to the past. On the plane of ideology, too, totemism, animism and the magic cult of barbarism coexist with modern ideas of science and democracy. "We have all these ages," wrote Nehru, "represented in us and in our country today. We have the growth of nuclear science in India and atomic energy and we have the cowdung age.... We are plunging into the world of science and technology and trying to organise our knowledge in such a way that it commands more of the forces of nature, and we are held back not only by poverty and under-development but also by some inherited ideas and customs.... So in the tumult and confusion of our time we stand facing both ways, forward to the future, and backward to the past, being pulled in both directions."

It is true that science is changing the established patterns in economy, education and culture, and technical progress is revolutionising the spheres of production. And, in this process, many old myths and legends are being swept away, the result being a shift in basic values. At the same time, many aspects of the socio-economic structure carry the marks of earlier epochs. Primitive thought survives in the form of myths and irrational faiths. The popular craze for astrologers and quacks who are sought after even by highly educated persons is an instance. The doctor in the operation theatre bows to an unseen god before taking the surgical knife in hand; the engineer consults the fortune-teller before beginning the construction of a bridge; and the worker who takes part in militant trade union struggles joins a religious procession with equal enthusiasm. The very process of development which generates contradictions and strifes in society nurtures doubts and conflicts in the minds of the people. The growing economic disparity, the gap between real income and its purchasing power, the rise in prices, food scarcity, corruption and black-marketing, the growing hardships of the people, the failure of the men in power to bring about radical changes in the social structure and lead the country to the avowed objective of socialism—these have evoked a moral and spiritual crisis and a sense of helplessness, frustration, despair and cynicism, as also of anger, indignation and revolt. These conditions are congenial to forces which wish to take the country in a backward direction. Reaction feeds

not only on the moral crisis and the frustration and despair of the people, but on the survivals of old religions and social prejudices, on obscurantism and superstitions, on the forces of separatism and disintegration, and other barriers to progress.

Thus, India is in the throes of a struggle between the old and the new. The different classes and groups of people offer different solutions to the problems facing the nation. These contradictory interests are inevitably reflected in the ideology and philosophical outlook of the people. Reactionary elements still exert a powerful influence on the people. They often encourage separatist tendencies and religious, communal and caste rivalries. The communal and religious organisations habitually stand in the way of secularism, democracy and national integration. They pervert the creative energies of the people and retard the struggle for economic amelioration and socialism. There are hundreds of mutts, monasteries and other communal and religious institutions and thousands of sanyasins, purohits and priests who foster exclusiveness and obscurantism and exhort the people to look inward and return to the past. They uphold all that is negative in the religious, philosophical and cultural traditions of the country and the prevailing instincts and prejudices which tend to check the advance of the new. The outmoded doctrines of Maya, Karma, transmigration of the soul and Varanasrama dharma, which have proved to be drag on the path to progress, are being revived and popularised again. Communalism and narrow religious fanaticism, caste distinctions, astrology and yajnas, and everything that hinders the healthy development of a secular, composite culture are being encouraged and patronised. The protagonists of chauvinistic revivalism still speak about "Islamic state" and "Hindu nationhood." According to the R.S.S. Chief, Guru Golwalkar, "Hindus are the true children of this soil and a nation because they have a common blood. They are a brotherhood—a race determined by a common origin possessing a common blood."

The talk about brotherhood and common blood does not, however, mean that all Hindus are equal and must be treated as brothers; for, Hinduism is supposed to be Sanatana Dharma, which involves revival of the old Varnasrama system of society under pre-

sent conditions. Swami Bharati Krishna Tirtha defines Sanatana Dharma as "the religion of (i.e. the religion founded by) the Eternal One, namely, God Himself, and not by any person born subsequently," and asserts that the caste system is strictly in accordance with the scriptures which are binding on every man and woman. Referring to the Purusha Sukta in the Rig Veda wherein "the various castes [are] described as emanating from and constituting different parts of the same Virat Purusha," the Swamiji argues that the unity of the body social cannot be achieved by calling for a mechanical uniformity of position, of rank and of function among them all and even ventures to add that untouchability and unapproachability are strictly in accordance with the discoveries of modern eugenics. He says: "There are four kinds of pollution: first, the *jata-shoucha*, where there is a child born; secondly, *kshaya shoucha*, or pollution by death; thirdly, pollution by menses; and fourthly, untouchability or pollution by chandala or pratiloma-offspring. All these are referred to in the same sloka and the distance for conveying pollution is laid down as 2, 4, 8 and 16 feet, which means that they are all in the same category and there is no question of hatred or contempt coming in. . . . You have not only untouchability but unapproachability also proved by science."[1] K.M. Munshi is of the view that Chathurvarnya or Varna dharma promotes "the highest good through social institutions" and tries to justify the caste system with the argument that "by heredity, birth, temperament and capability, men are not equal. Division of society into groups, formed on the basis of common vocation and common community of interest is natural to men." His prescription for "the highest good" of society is as follows: "Men, by temperament, heritage and environment differ from each other in aptitudes and capabilities and can be divided into a hierarchy of (a) the leaders of society being inspired by light, (b) the class of active men who are characterised by energy, (c) the third class of men in whom energy is associated with inertia, and (d) the class of men who are inert. A non-competitive society must prescribe the duties and functions of each class

[1]Swami Bharata Krishna Tirtha: *Sanatana Dharma*.

according to the temperament, environment and aptitude of large sections in each class, in a way that does not inflate the ego of the individual. This implies that social opinion must prescribe for each the duties and functions of its class regulating his greed or love of pleasure."[2]

These statements are not mere exercises in phantasy. Munshi and other writers like him are trying to maintain the remnants of a bygone age in order to prevent the democratisation of the social and political life of the country and to uphold the right of the feudal lord and the capitalist to exploit "the class of men who are inert."

Idealism is another weapon used not only against socialism and scientific materialism, but also against the public sector, land reforms, non-alignment and other progressive policies. Sampurnanand, for example, believes that Vedanta and private property are inseparable. In his view, the public sector in industries is a communist measure and he is opposed to communism because, "for the communist the substratum of this universe is matter, non-conscious and subject to change according to the inherent law of its own nature," whereas for "the Indian mind," the basis of the universe is Brahman, the nature of which is consciousness. "The Universe," he writes, "is the product of nescience. All movement—we may call it evolution, if we choose—is a product of the neverceasing efforts of the individual to cast off the nescience which veils the inner core of consciousness." The state is not expected to stand in the way of individual efforts for the removal of nescience and for making the individual ego "identical with the universal ego." "The Individual," he asserts, "has certain fundamental, inalienable rights by virtue of his being what is a conscious eternal ego, a spark of the great effulgence that is the Universal Ego. The state will refuse to recognise these rights at its peril."[3] And, according to him, these individual rights necessarily include the right of the individual "to invest capital and run industrial concerns" and, therefore, "it is considered necessary in the general interest to retain what is called the private sector."

C. Rajagopalachari, another exponent of Vedanta, admits that

[2]K.M. Munshi: *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 68.

[3]Sampurnanand: *Indian Socialism*.

"man cannot adjudge or even understand the will of God or His plan or even His nature";[4] but, at the same time, he affirms that "if we reject Him we shall reject civilization, for this rests not on 'material' progress but spiritual endeavour and self-control and honest cooperation, all of which depend on faith in a Supreme Power."[5] Faith in the Supreme Being implies that man should see that "his conduct and life do not offend the eternal laws of right behaviour." According to Rajagopalachari, one of the chief elements of right behaviour is recognition of the sanctity of private property. "Whatever you hold as your own," he writes, "look upon it as given by God to you and look upon yourself as entrusted with it only for good uses. This is the reconciliation between the character of individual property and the claim of society. The claim of society to the benefit of all that its members hold cannot be denied. But the pull to do away with 'property' and the rights appertaining to it, will kill the incentive to produce and safeguard it against waste." And, therefore, "private enterprises should be fostered by every means available and not treated as a dangerous enemy." "The role of the government," in his view, "should be that of a catalyst in stimulating economic development while individual initiative and enterprise are given the fullest play." But, Rajagopalachari is opposed to the idea of allowing similar freedom to the worker. "I simply cannot understand planned economy along with the right to strike," he says. "The Government, therefore, must control the greatest single element among all that go to make production, *viz.*, man-power. The state must lay down the law and have no qualms."[6]

But, this is only one side of the picture. Forces of secularism and national integration, of democracy and socialism also are growing. It is true that progressive social forces, really interested in instituting radical structural reforms and taking the country forward, are disunited and are still in search of a dynamic philosophy of life. But, it is undeniable that they exist and are growing. And, the future appears to be theirs.

[4]Rajagopalachari: *Satyameva Jayate.*
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 236.
[6]*Ibid.*

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

WHITHER INDIAN PHILOSOPHY?

MODERN Indian thought grew out of the naive humanism of our classical philosophers developing through the centuries with many shifts and modifications. Its foundation was laid in antiquity by the blending of the beliefs and urges of the pre-Aryan primitive tribes of India with the culture of the early Aryans reflected in the hymns of the Rig Veda. It developed through age-long conflicts between materialism and idealism, between naturalism and spiritualism, and enriched itself by its assimilation of many new elements drawn from Islam and Christianity and Western philosophy and modern science. It is true that there have been occasional distortions and negations of healthy this-worldliness. Especially during economic and social crises and in periods of spiritual stagnation, the world-affirming tendencies often gave way to escapism and irrational mysticism and life appeared as an illusion, nothing but misery. But, it cannot be denied that a high sense of life-affirming humanism has been the essence and the running thread of the teachings of religious leaders and philosophers of India.

Many idealist thinkers and conservative political leaders, however, consider Advaita Vedanta as almost synonymous with Indian philosophy and glorify it as the only philosophy that has stood the test of time. Some of them even assert that "idealism has been particularly representative of Indian thought till now," as P.T. Raju does in his "Idealist Thought of India" or claim that "all culture in India has been rooted in Vedanta," as Rajagopalachari does in his "Hinduism." Foreign writers like Schweitzer have gone to the extent of remarking that the essential theme of Indian thought is "world-and-life negation." To say that Indian philosophy has always been idealist or life-negating or that it is rooted in Vedanta is a distortion of history; for, as we have seen in the pages of this work, the dominant Indian thought in the early stages was neither idealist nor inward-looking, but

optimistic and life-affirming, making bold conjectures and speculations as to the reality of the world and its diverse phenomena and the human mind, tirelessly seeking the truth of the relation between man and the universe and a solution for problems worrying mankind and carrying on ceaseless struggles against the dominant priestly class and the superstitions fostered by them. Not that idealist thought was of no significance. It did exert its influence on the mind of the people. But, materialism was the dominant trend in most of the ancient systems of Indian philosophy like the Samkhya, the Vaiseshika, the Nyaya, the Svabhava Vada, the Yadrichha Vada, the Vaibhashika, the Sautrantika and the Lokayata. The early Buddhists and Jainas were not materialists in the strict sense of the term but they did not believe in God as the source of the universe. Some of these systems produced great philosophers who, like the early Greek thinkers, were "natural-born dialecticians," as Engels put it.

It is true, of course, that the early Indian materialists could not correctly reveal the laws governing nature and society. They could not understand at that time the real nature of the mental processes, the constructive activities of the brain and the central nervous system and the relation between subjective, sensuous activity and social environment. Their materialism was naive and speculative, and appeared in rather vague and undeveloped forms. These weaknesses and shortcomings were only natural, for, in those ancient days, technology was still at a low stage of development and scientific thought still speculative. "The chief defect of all materialism up to now," Marx wrote in his "Theses on Feuerbach," "is that the object, reality, what we apprehend through our senses, is understood only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, as practice; not subjectively. Hence in opposition to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism—which of course does not know real sensuous activity as such."[1] Thus, the early idealism of India known as the Vedanta, however swollen, onesided and inadequate, served to a certain extent the purpose of a corrective.

[1]Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach.*

And, it was in the process of incessant struggles between early idealism and early materialism that Indian philosophical thought developed and matured.

Whatever its defects and weaknesses, Badarayana's Vedanta which itself was systematised from the idealist concepts scattered in the Upanishads, was neither subjective idealism nor other-worldly mysticism. It was the expression—however distorted and unscientific it may have been—of the highest human aspiration for perfection, wholeness and eternity, for the integration of the "I" into the totality of the universe. "Probably," as Nehru pointed out, "the ethic of the individual perfection was over-emphasised and hence the social outlook suffered."[2] But, the outlook of the ancient thinker was neither narrow nor self-centred. On the contrary, he saw "the whole world of mortals as an interdependent organism."

It was only with the emergence of Sankara and his philosophy that Vedanta began to play an escapist and world-negating role. But then, Sankara's Advaita Vedanta was vehmently opposed by philosophers like Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Nimbarka who founded their own schools of Vedanta. These latter philosophers were objective idealists and some of their teachings inspired the optimistic and humanistic trends in later Indian thought. Life-denying passivity, contemplation, resignation and renunciation were some of the main characteristics of feudal thought conditioned by a low level of technology and stagnation in productive activities. Man was helpless in the face of flood and drought, disease and poverty, exploitation and oppression. He was too weak to change nature and society in his own favour. He, therefore, took refuge in religious doctrines of Karma and transmigration of soul. Whatever happened to anybody was supposed to be the inevitable result of the inexorable law of Karma. Any attempt to change social environment was regarded as an affront to the law of Karma and to God's justice. The will of God had to be accepted with quiet resignation and serenity.

But, religion served not only as an opiate, but as a stimulant also.

[2] J. Nehru: *The Discovery of India*, p. 78.

Religious leaders of the bhakti movement maintained the ideas of spiritual equality and brotherhood of man in the face of injustice and oppression, anxiety and misery. They held aloft ideals and values which, although unrealisable in the given conditions, gave man a vision of eternity and faith in the future. It is true that the leaders of the bhakti movement often acted under confused emotional impulses without any clear socio-economic perspective and that their egalitarianism and humanistic ideas contained elements of pessimistic mysticism and asceticism. Theirs was an appeal to the spirit and not a call for action to change the social order. "Pessimism, non-resistance, appeal to the Spirit," Lenin pointed out, "is the ideology that inevitably appears in an epoch when the entire old order is turned upside down and when the masses who have been brought up under this old order, who imbibed with their mother's milk the principles, the habits, the traditions and beliefs of this order, do not and cannot see what kind of a new order is taking shape, what social forces are shaping it, and how they are doing it, what social forces are capable of bringing release from the incalculable and exceptionally acute distress that is characteristic of epochs of upheaval."[3]

It is, however, undeniable that the teachings of the progressive Muslim and Hindu saints of the later Middle Ages not only inspired many anti-feudal struggles, but laid the basis of the new religious reform movement of the nineteenth century. The impact of modern ideas accompanying the political and economic changes had become irresistible and there was a new awareness of human capabilities. The development of the capitalist mode of production, exchange of commodities and the increased means of transport and communications had begun to undermine the old compact village life based on caste and Karma and to foster forces of individualism, liberalism, secularism and humanism. Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mohammed Iqbal were the finest representatives of these modern values. They tried to bring Indian philosophic thought from the pessimistic clouds of abstraction to the optimistic ground of reality. They transformed the transcendent

[3]V. I. Lenin: *L.N. Tolstoy and his Age.*

God into an immanent God. God was not something above and beyond the universe, but the totality of goodness, beauty, truth and love. The form, symbols and categories were all those of idealism, but the content was progressive. Old values emanating from the doctrines of fatalism gave way to new values of creativity, human dignity and freedom.

These life-affirming humanist values were often expressed in the language of religion and idealism. Nevertheless, they had tremendous social impact. Raising the banner of Practical Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda, for instance, declared that socialism was indispensable for the advancement of the country and that the labouring masses should come to power. It would be interesting to compare Vivekananda's Vedanta with the Vedanta of some of our political leaders like Munshi, Sampurnanand and Rajagopalachari who uphold the sanctity of private property or with the Vedanta of the present-day sadhus and sanyasins who preach unashamed obscurantism and call for a return to the past.

This is not to suggest that all idealist thinkers of the present period are reactionaries who support obsolete social relations. It cannot be denied that there is a growing awareness among our professional philosophers that a mere revival or reconstruction of the old concepts does not suit the needs of the country. Many of them realise that any philosophy which is not in harmony with the aspirations of the people—for industrialisation, economic independence, agrarian reforms, freedom from exploitation, peace and socialism — is worthless in the present context. They are making an earnest attempt to bring philosophy down from the dizzy heights to the earth. At the 28th session of the Philosophical Congress at Baroda in 1953, K. C. Gupta observed: "It is through living experience—the experience of colours and sounds, hunger and misery, dirt and filth, power and plenitude, frustration and achievement, beauty and sublimity—that we gain contact with reality. An enquirer who withdraws his gaze completely from the world of experience and turns his eyes inwards to discover reality in the inner depths of the self will end by coming upon a vacuity, and philosophy which cuts itself adrift from living experience and does not return to that experience in order to revitalize itself

is bound to defeat its own end.... Truth cannot be attained exclusively by means of an activity of pure thought; it has to be attained through our central and dominant experiences, and we can have a sound philosophy only when it focusses the total conviction which arises out of the manysided activities in which we are engaged in our daily life."[4] P. T. Raju, author of some well-known books on Indian idealism, wrote in 1957: "Economic necessities, which are basic, are stronger than spiritual necessities. When the former are not satisfied, man feels their reality more strongly and may ignore spiritual needs. This is an age of economic optimism for India, and Indian philosophy has, therefore, to be on guard and become expansive to cover the values of this world, to which it should give spiritual direction and guidance.... Philosophy should be made socially useful, and the strong individualism of our traditional spiritual philosophies has to be modified. The idea that man is a social being has to be seriously incorporated into philosophy."[5]

With the far-reaching social and economic changes in India and outside, a progressive world outlook is becoming more pronounced in the thinking of a number of Indian philosophers. Many of them still find themselves bound to their idealist past but, within the bounds of idealism, they uphold progressive ideas and unhesitatingly support the advance of science and technology and the national endeavour for material prosperity. What they earnestly seek is to synthesize idealism and science. Such an attitude is especially noticeable in the writings and speeches of the philosopher-president, Dr. Radhakrishnan. In one of his speeches in 1965, he stated: "After the Second World War, a number of nations both in Asia and Africa have become free. But political freedom is not an end in itself. We may have political freedom, but if the people die of starvation, if they are ill-clad, ill-housed, ill-educated, if they suffer from destitution, disease, poverty, ignorance, then that freedom is not worth much. So all must be provided with the elementary necessities of food, clothing and shelter, if their self-expression and development are not to be impeded. The only way

[4] *Indian Philosophical Congress, 28th Session*, Baroda, 1953.

[5] P. T. Raju: *The Prabudha Bharatha*, August 1957.

by which we can set these things at rest is by the development of science and technology, the application of them to agriculture, industry, medicine, etc."[6] In the same speech, he said : "Man is not to regard himself as a mere item in a series of objective happenings. There is something in him which is beyond nature, which makes him sit in judgement on nature, which makes him understand what exactly it is that nature reveals. ... Whether it is scientific creation or artistic endeavour or even a technological development, all these things make you feel that you are not merely a part of nature; in a larger sense there is a non-natural element in you, an element which exceeds mere nature; that element therefore is to be called the spirit of man. It is that spirit which is responsible for all the achievements which we had in this world."[7]

Radhakrishnan is convinced that man has a real role in the making of history and that human nature can be changed by human effort without the intervention of any supernatural being. "We need a renewal of human nature," he wrote in 1957, "a creative transformation which will lift us out of fear and suffering, out of despondency and helplessness, which will set us to work bravely for the new world. This new world is deeply concerned with science and technology."[8] But, he added: "There is, however, no incompatibility between the findings of science and the doctrines of religion. The search of truth is their common goal though they have different ways of approach to it."[9]

It is, however, doubtful if any attempt to synthesize science and idealism will succeed; for, modern science is essentially based on empirical, verifiable data and a positive, secular and materialistic approach to reality, while idealism starts with the *a priori* assumption of a Supreme Being beyond material phenomena, which cannot be comprehended by the finite mind. Science affirms that truth is accessible to human thought and understanding through rational, scientific enquiry and not through intuition. Before science reached its preeminence in the pursuit

[6]Radhakrishnan: *Speeches and Writings*, p. 134.
[7]*Ibid.*
[8]*Ibid.*
[9]*Ibid.*

of knowledge, people had no facilities to study facts concerning the complex physical, psychical and psychological processes involved in the human mechanism, and it was only natural that they based their philosophical speculations on an *a priori* general theory like the belief in a soul existing independently of the physical body and a spirit above nature and beyond the universe. But, today when "the soul can be grasped by hand and brought to the laboratory" and the laws of its function can be ascertained on living organisms, there is little justification for such hypothetical notions. Man with his physical, mental and spiritual capacities can be studied today on a scientific footing at once as part of nature and distinct from nature in the sense that he can sit in judgment over nature.

Perhaps, when Radhakrishnan speaks about materialism and nature, what he has in mind is the inert, insentient nature and the crude, vulgar, mechanical materialism which ignores the wonderful capacities of the human mind and the possibilities of its development. But, modern scientific materialism has nothing to do with this vulgar and mechanical understanding of matter. It does not underestimate the power of the human personality and agrees with Radhakrishnan that "man is not to regard himself as a mere item in a series of objective happenings," and that human nature can be changed. "By acting on the external world and changing it," wrote Marx, "man changes his own nature." Thus, man, his inner nature, society and the external world are all inseparably connected. By making suitable changes in the environment and the social structure, man's status in the universe can be enhanced. That is why Marx laid special emphasis on "the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, servile, neglected, contemptible being," and the creation of a social order "in which the free development of each is the free development of all."

Idealist writers and religious leaders often attribute to materialism all sorts of vices connected with the vulgar doctrines of "eat, drink and be merry." They claim that moral values are inseparably linked with idealism and faith in God. But, such assertions have been refuted by facts. Can anybody deny that the history of

religions is replete not only with meaningless rituals, dogmas and superstition but also with violence, vulgarity and inhuman barbarities? What of the atrocities of the Inquisition perpertrated by the Christian Church? What of the brutalities of Brahminism and of untouchability, unapproachability and burning of widows sanctified by Hinduism? Shall we also narrate the bloody feuds of the religious sects during the Middle Ages? Radhakrishnan has conceded that "too much blood has been unnecessarily and unjustly shed in the name of religious doctrines." But, there he would add that these barbarities have nothing to do with true religion which, to him, means leading a good and moral life and for which a belief in the supernatural is essential.

But, the fact is that throughout the ages, countless people believed in God while living as they pleased. Even today, we find a host of sadhus and matajis who swear that there is nothing but Brahman and yet lead a parasitical life and worse. Since Independence, the number of temples and churches have increased as never before, and along with them the "get-rich-quick" mentality has also spread fast. The same devout persons who spend lavishly on temples and churches are often the patron saints of corruption, blackmarket and other social vices. The reason seems to be that morality and ethical values which are based on blind faith in a Divine Being and which are subordinated to the desire for heaven or the fear of hell are devoid of any high social purpose. To people who believe in God or religious dogmas, life appears as the predetermined design of the Almighty. To those who adhere to philosophic materialism, on the contrary, the significance and purpose of life are based not on dogmas or revelation but on scientific knowledge of reality. They do not surrender to the will of God or blame the law of Karma for man's stupidity and ignorance. In their view, man has to choose between good and bad, between selflessness and selfishness, between humanism and barbarity, between beauty and ugliness. They are not concerned with a life after death, but with the possibility of a happy, noble and spiritual life on the earth itself. They are also convinced that this possibility depends upon the removal of all the existing social, economic and political causes of human suffering and the creation of favourable conditions for

the full and unfettered development of human personality. According to them, spiritual well-being is not taking refuge in religious rituals and superstitions, in mystic fantasy or in irrational absolutes. It is the development of human personality on the basis of scientific knowledge. They are, therefore, of the view that secular ethics, shorn of their idealist and religious cover and based on scientific knowledge of the laws of social development and an intense love of man, are more conducive to human welfare than morals based on religion. This is not to suggest that moral and spiritual qualities like courage, honesty, uprightness, love and unselfish devotion to duty are the automatic outcome of the acceptance of a new social philosophy. The point is that moral standards must inseparably be linked with man's efforts to achieve on this earth the ideals of peace, freedom, equality, fraternity and justice through suitable changes in the social, economic and political environment.

Certain Marxist writers have expressed the erroneous view that all moral values in capitalist society serve only the interests of the ruling classes, that socialism lays the basis for an "entirely new morality." Indeed, one Marxist writer has gone to the extent of remarking that "the attempt to establish a humanistic ethics for the working class prior to their creating the conditions for building socialism could be a way of disarming them before they can make a revolution, like white liberals urging non-violence on the Afro-American people"[10] and that the ethics of the working class lie in the victory of the class struggle. Needless to say, such views have nothing in common with the teachings of Karl Marx.

It is difficult to imagine that the vast masses of the people who live, labour and struggle under the capitalist system are not interested in moral values or that the values which they uphold serve only the interests of their exploiters. The experience of centuries of human progress shows that it is not mere material self-interest but the impulse of high humanistic ethics that has made men change their social environment and even sacrifice themselves in that noble attempt. Ethical values are not mere reflections of the

[10]William Ash in *Science Society*, Summer, 1966.

economic and social conditions of an epoch. They are not mere by-products of economic and political changes. They are also acts of valuation which depend on man's experiences, his reactions to his environment and his relations with the world. Man is the creator of moral, ethical and spiritual values—truth and beauty, love and goodness, compassion and brotherhood, freedom, democracy and socialism. It is true that they are not born out of the passing moods, subjective fancies or "pure thought" of individuals. They are certainly conditioned by society. Man's manifold activities, thoughts and values are influenced by social conditions. But, he is not merely a product of material and social conditions. He is in a position to accept the conditions or reject them, to defend them or transform them. Thus, within limitations imposed by social conditions, he is free to think and to act and to use his knowledge to shape his own destiny. He is free to uphold progressive human values or support dehumanising values. The difference between the history of nature and that of human society lies precisely in this: whereas in nature there are only blind, unconscious agencies acting upon one another, in human society "nothing happens without a conscious purpose, without an intended aim." Engels wrote:

> "Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills operating in different directions and of their manifold effects upon the outer world that constitutes history. Thus it is also a question of what the many individuals desire. The will is determined by passion or deliberation. But the levers which immediately determine passion or deliberation are of very different kinds. Partly they may be external objects, partly ideal motives, ambition, 'enthusiasm for truth and justice,' personal hatred or even purely individual whims of all kinds."[11]

This does not mean, however, that all consciously desired aims and intentions of all individuals are fulfilled. They are realisable

[11]Marx and Engels: *On Religion*, p. 255.

only in definite conditions and environment; for, man does not exist in a vacuum. He lives in society and is a part of society. The producers of cultural and spiritual values are, therefore, "real active men as determined by a definite development of their productive forces and the intercourse corresponding to those productive forces up to its remotest form."[12] Every generation finds already in existence a certain level of productive forces and certain historically created social relations which are handed down to it by its predecessor and which "prescribe to that generation their own conditions of life and give it a definite development."[13] "Men make their own history," Marx observed, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."[14] In other words, circumstances make man, just as man makes circumstances. Thus, moral and ethical values are neither manifestations of man's innate and inalienable nature, independent of the social environment, nor mere reflections of the environment created by the interplay of productive forces. They are, above all, concepts of the relations between man and the universe. Moral values influence social development and social development in its turn influences moral values.

Since times immemorial, man has been aspiring for a happy life on earth and for the realisation of some of the noblest ethical and spiritual values of humanity. But, his aspirations and values remained unrealised and unrealisable under dehumanising social conditions. Yet, man did not lose heart. What he could not achieve in reality, he tried to keep alive in ideas, in imagination. It is true that even unrealisable ideas had a social significance in that they held aloft the vision of the future. But, vision was no substitute for a happy life. And man's life continued to be miserable. With all his vision and values, he was materially and spiritually oppressed by dehumanising conditions.

The situation is now different. The objective conditions in the

[12]Marx and Engels: *German Ideology*.

[13]*Ibid*.

[14]"Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Marx and Engels: *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 225.

world are such that the age-old, universal, humanistic values proclaimed by our ancient medieval thinkers can at last be actually realised. The development of science and technology on a vast scale and their application to industry and agriculture have made it possible for man to remove once for all poverty, disease, misery and destitution and the concomitant evils from the face of the earth. If these glorious human achievements still embrace only a privileged few and not the entire people, it is only because of the tyranny of the social and political structure and because of the stupid egoism of the self-seeking ruling *elite*. The existing conditions will not, however, continue for ever; for, the awareness is growing that man has progressed far enough to secure sufficient control over nature and productive forces, to establish a classless social order and to create new forms of social life.

Socialism is not only a revolutionary departure from capitalism. It is also a continuity. The immense productive forces and technological knowledge developed by capitalism are not destroyed but are only freed from the irrational barriers of capitalist relations and carried over to the new society and developed further. Similarly, the cultural and spiritual values, too, are taken over and enriched. Ethical and humanistic values in a socialist society are not the negation of all values of the previous epochs but their continuation and enrichment to suit the needs of the entire people. The rich cultural heritage of the previous epochs is the foundation on which man develops his personality and his noblest "human" qualities in the new social order.

It is true that much of our heritage has become obsolete and an obstacle to further progress and has to be discarded. But, much of it can be and has to be accepted and assimilated. As Jawaharlal Nehru said:

> "India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present. Our lives are encumbered with the dead-wood of this past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go. But that does not mean a break with, or a forgetting of, the vital and life-giving in the past. We can never forget the ideals that have moved our race, the dreams of the Indian people

through the ages, the wisdom of the ancients, the buoyant energy and love of life and nature of our forefathers, their spirit of curiosity and mental adventure, the daring of their thought, the splendid achievements in literature, art and culture, their love of truth and beauty and freedom, the basic values that they set up, their understanding of life's mysterious ways, their toleration of ways other than theirs, their capacity to absorb other people and their cultural accomplishments, to synthesize them and develop a varied and mixed culture; nor can we forget the myriad experiences which have built up our ancient race and lie embedded in our subconscious minds."

Such vital and life-giving aspects will remain after the radical changes in social conditions because, in a sense, they embody a lasting truth and certain universal values which transcend epochs and cut across barriers of classes. True, continuity is not mechanical reproduction, but creative transformation. "Life goes on," as Radhakrishnan observes, "not by reproducing the past but by accepting it and by weaving it into the future in which the past undergoes a rebirth. The main thing is to remember and create anew."[15] We have, therefore, to accept whatever is healthy and progressive in our cultural heritage and adapt it to the new conditions not only because it refines our mental capacities and elevates our spirit, but also because it serves as a firm foundation for the new society and the new culture that we aim at.

Among contemporary idealist philosophers, there are those who see nothing but an encircling gloom, and who exhort the people to turn their eyes inward, that is, to retreat from the world of action to the world of contemplation. T.M.P. Mahadevan, for instance, said in his presidential address to the 30th session of the Indian Philosophical Congress, "None who has pondered over the happenings of the last half century can avoid a sense of frustration and be unaffected by the encircling gloom.... The mortal illness which afflicts modern man is excessive outwardness. If he should be saved, he must be made to turn back from his meaningless race

[15] S. Radhakrishnan: *Fragments of a Confession* in Paul Arthur Schilpp: *The Philosophy of Sarvapally Radhakrishnan*, p. 10.

for material power. Not by adding things to oneself can one be happy. True happiness lies within. It can be attained only by him who is not misled by the outer look of things, but succeeds in getting at their soul and rediscovers there his true self."[18]

It is true that a sense of frustration and depression is pervading the general atmosphere. Our people are passing through a deep moral and spiritual crisis, not because they are lacking in philosophers exhorting them to look inward and not forward. The inner crisis is, in fact, a reflection of the outer socio-economic reality.

In the Middle Ages, the life of the individual was inseparably linked with that of a compact group. Whatever the limitations and narrowness of this life, the individual always felt himself part of a village community, a joint family, a caste or a clan and, thus, enjoyed a sense of security. Industrialisation and the development of trade, transport and communications and modern education have combined to undermine this traditional pattern of life. The individual is being isolated from the integrated whole and left to his own ingenuity and capabilities in a chaotic and competitive world. On the one hand, the individual is being torn from the collective life of his disintegrating unit; on the other, he is not yet able to find sufficient opportunities for self-development on his own. The old world is crumbling to pieces, but the new world of his cherished dreams is not coming into being. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that man tends to lose himself and begins to feel lonely, abandoned and alienated. Dehumanisation is inherent in the development of capitalism with its growing inequalities, widening disparities and sharpening class contradictions, with its discrepancies between high and low earnings and between the egoism and affluence of the privileged few and the pauperisation of the many, with its corruption, self-aggrandisement and violence which degrade social relations and pervert human personality. True happiness does not lie in shunning creative activities and in taking refuge in mystic contemplation of the inner self, but in the effort to remove the causes of frustration and despair and to

[18]T.M.P. Mahadevan: *The Rediscovery of man* in *Indo-Asian Culture*, July, 1956

cleanse life of all evils, oppression and violence. True devotion to humanistic values demands an uncompromising struggle to transform social conditions which degrade the human personality. No moral or ethical value which is not linked with the fundamental aspirations of the people for a better life can offer them a way out of the encircling gloom. Ethical values prescribed and upheld in isolation from the socio-economic conditions often lose their significance and have no authority today.

While champions of idealism and religion imagine that human society will be better off if individuals abide by the unalterable rules of morality and if ethical and religious values are instilled into the people through education and propaganda, mechanical materialists and dogmatic Marxists assert that moral and ethical values will flourish only if capitalism is abolished and a socialist society built in its place. This view is also wrong, unscientific, for, man's spiritual development, as we have seen, is not an automatic by-product of social and economic changes. It is true that a society without exploitation and oppression will create better conditions for the development of human personality. But, the transformation of the material basis of society cannot by itself guarantee this end. It requires the transformation of human nature itself by the conscious efforts of individuals through mutual help and understanding for the common good. What is, therefore, needed is not a transcendent morality divorced from life, but a morality which translates the passion for the ideals of righteousness, love, brotherhood, and beauty into active efforts for their realisation in the actual life, into the day-to-day struggles of the people for a better social order. It is the absence of such an integrated philosophical outlook that is mainly, if not wholly, responsible for the prevailing apathy, pessimism, frustration and cynicism in Indian society.

A purposeful social philosophy with a clear awareness of the direction of change and of our ultimate objectives has, thus, become indispensable for our progress. "Our final aim," Nehru wrote in his "Autobiography," "can only be a classless society with equal economic justice and opportunity for all, a society organised on a planned basis for raising of mankind to higher material and cultural

levels, to a cultivation of spiritual values of cooperation, unselfishness, the spirit of service, the desire to do right, goodwill and love—ultimately a world order." The task of philosophy today is to give a new meaning and content to man's life by answering the deeper questions about the world and his relation to it and by enabling him to solve the problems presented by a changing society.

But, any philosophy, however scientific and correct it may be, is only a guide to action. The main thing to remember, therefore, is that the forces of progress must act so as to change the present and shape it into the future. "Hitherto the philosophers," wrote Marx, "have only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it."

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